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From Perpetrator to Protector?

– Post-war Rebel Networks as Informal Security Providers in Liberia

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Abstract

The dismantling of rebel structures at the end of civil war is often considered to be one of the most important aspects of a successful transition to peace. Combatants are expected to lay down their weapons, but also to abandon their wartime networks. Yet, peace agreements and subsequent Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes do not automatically, or necessarily, destroy rebel networks. In Liberia such structures have lingered since the war came to an end in 2003 and networks of ex-combatants are still active, though maintained and mobilised for new purposes.

The security political situation in Liberia, with weak formal security institutions and a history of predatory behaviour, has created an environment where informal initiatives for security and protection are called upon. In such an environment informal security groups have a natural platform. Based on original interview material and findings from fieldwork this thesis examines how post-war rebel networks are organised and operate in the informal security arena, while describing the rationale behind these lingering features of war. By doing so this thesis sheds light on how the adaptive capacity of former rebel soldiers is utilised by various Liberian actors, and the risks, but also possible positive outcomes, of such a development.

This dissertation follows individuals, former rebel commanders in particular, in post-war rebel networks from the time of war to 2013. We will see them, and ex-combatants around them, mobilised as 'recycled' warriors in times of regional wars and crisis, as vigilantes and informal security providers for economic and political purposes. Yet, we will also meet them when there are no specific event ex-combatants could be mobilised to fully examine the relevance of post-war rebel networks and ex-combatant identity in contemporary Liberia. In the conclusions basic underlying aims and purposes with the processes of demobilisation and reintegration are challenged. And as this thesis finds, one might even argue that these ex-combatants have succeeded in reintegrating themselves due to, not despite, the fact that they have not been demobilised.

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Mariam Bjarnesen,

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1. Introduction

Security, insecurity and post-war rebel networks in Liberia

In August 2003 the war in Liberia came to an end. After two civil wars (1989 – 1996 and 1999 – 2003) the warring parties signed the peace agreement that ended years of brutal fighting. The war-torn republic now stood before enormous challenges. The fragile state was to be rebuilt and security established. Since then Liberia, with major assistance and funding from the international community, has undergone a Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR)² process of ex-combatants to restore peace and stability as well as Security Sector Reform (SSR) in attempt to reform the state security institutions, such as the Liberian National Police (LNP) and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). In July 2009, almost six years after the war ended, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf announced the formal closure of Liberia's DDRR programme, noting that the success of the programme was a testimony to the return of peace and security.³ But as Paul Richards reminds us in his work on the continuum of war and peace, "...turning back towards peace, even beyond a peace agreement, is a rocky path with many pitfalls; that the hidden or silent violence behind conflict has to be addressed if peace is to be sustained..."⁴ And, as Carolyn Nordstrom rightly points out, the habits of war die hard. Aspects of war continue past peace accords to affect the daily life of a society until they are dismantled, habit by habit.⁵ Despite the words of the Liberian president, it is thus not surprising that a closer look at the current security political situation of the country will reveal that insecurity still prevails in Liberia. And despite the efforts mentioned above, as this dissertation intends to show, so do former rebel networks and chains of command, maintained and re-mobilised for new purposes. *The overall purpose of this thesis is, therefore, to examine how and why rebel networks remain relevant and continue to affect the security political situation in post-war Liberia.*

² The most commonly used acronym for this process is DDR, understood as Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration. In the Liberian process, however, an additional "R" for Rehabilitation was included. In this dissertation I will use the term "DDRR" when I refer to the specific Liberian case and "DDR" when referring to the process in general.

³ UNMIL Today, "DDR Wraps up", Vol. 6, Issue 2, July 2009.

⁴ Paul Richards, *No Peace No War: An Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflicts*, Ohio University Press, 2005, p. 14.

⁵ Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War – Violence, Power and International Profiteering in the Twenty-First Century*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 141.

The relevance of rebel structures post-war – Main research questions

To dismantle rebel structures (if they are not turned into political parties for example) is naturally one of the most important aspects of the transition from war to peace. The combatants are expected not only to lay down their weapons but also to abandon their wartime networks. The general view is that removing ex-combatants from their former fighting units will strengthen post-conflict security and reduce the risk of renewed warfare. As these networks once were capable of creating chaos and conflict, it is naturally assumed that, if not disbanded, they would remain an acute threat to security and stability. Yet, peace agreements and subsequent DDR processes do not automatically, or necessarily, destroy rebel networks.⁶ In Liberia such structures have lingered, and networks of ex-combatants, as we shall see several examples of in the case studies to come in this thesis, are still active. As war is over, a natural assumption is that rebel networks would no longer be relevant, as their purpose, to conduct warfare against the ruling regime, is no longer of interest. Yet, what if there is a logic behind staying mobilised beyond waging war? What if there are incentives, not only for the ex-combatants themselves, but also for actors within the elite or ordinary citizens, to have these networks preserved rather than destroyed, even in a time of peace? What if there is a rationale behind keeping former rebel structures mobilised rather than demobilised, though now activated for different purposes than warfare? If that is the case – that several actors within post-war societies, contrary to the general assumption, do not see the demobilisation of former rebel networks as the most optimal solution post-war – would this not force us to rethink the actual chances of success for efforts aiming at destroying such networks? These are the kinds of questions that arise from the overall problem statement regarding how and why rebel networks remain relevant in post-war Liberia.

⁶ The comprehensive peace agreement signed in Accra, August 2003, represented, besides the Government of Liberia and the political parties, the rebel groups The Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and The Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). The post-war rebel networks I will refer to here include ex-combatants from these rebel groups or other Liberian rebel movements active in the first or second civil war between 1989 and 2003. Over 100,000 combatants were disarmed in the subsequent DDRR process.

Research and the literature on the challenges of DDR processes, with particular focus on the reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian life, have provided us with valuable insights into the complexity of such undertakings in recent years.⁷ The difficulties encountered in creating a stable post-war environment where the former combatants are integrated parts of civil society have also been emphasised. Lately the concept of reintegration has been further problematized. Bowd and Özerdem have, for instance, pointed out that DDR processes often focus too squarely on economic reintegration of ex-combatants, leaving a process of much needed social reintegration behind. Reintegration tends to be measured according to quantitative indicators such as level of employment or enrolment on training courses. Such approaches neglect issues that are only measurable through qualitative indicators, for example the need to address ex-combatants' societal relations, and issues of the lack of trust between ex-combatants and receiving communities.⁸ The research herein acknowledges this complexity, yet it has a different point of departure. In contrast to much of the literature on ex-combatants post-war, in this thesis I will not focus on the practice of DDR initiatives as such. Instead it is here in fact suggested that lingering rebel structures post-war may have less to do with how DDR processes have been carried out than is generally recognised. The practice of DDR, good or bad, may accordingly have little to do with the relevance of post-war rebel networks. The focus of this dissertation is instead on whether there in fact exists a *need* for post-war rebel networks in Liberia today, in particular in the security arena, a need that in this case would make DDR initiatives, no matter how well they are carried out, less relevant than is often assumed.

The analysis of this thesis, also in contrast to much of the literature on ex-combatants post-war, is not aimed at the mere challenges of reintegration of the ex-combatants. Instead the focus is on former rebels who rather than being reintegrated (or faced with a failed reintegration process which seems to be the reality for many ex-combatants) formed new

⁷ See for example *Reintegrating Armed Groups after Conflict – Politics, Violence and Transition*, Ed. Mats Berdal, and David H. Ucko, 2009, for an academic discussion of the issue. There is also a substantial body of policy-oriented literature, and manuals, on DDR and the practice of reintegrating ex-combatants in particular, from sources such as the World Bank, the UN, NGOs and policy institute. In the concluding chapter of this thesis what I identify as the paradox of demobilisation and the concept of DDR will be discussed in more detail.

⁸ Richard Bowd and Alpaslan Özerdem, "How to Assess Social Reintegration of Ex-Combatants", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 7:4, 453-475, 2013.

informal constellations, keeping intact all or part of their organisational structures from the war. Accordingly, I will herein examine former rebel soldiers' ability to transform and adapt to the present post-war political situation regarding security. I will investigate how this is done in the form of security- (or even insecurity-) providing networks, while at the same time analysing how organisational structures and skills acquired by the rebels during the wars, are not only useful for the ex-combatants themselves, but of strategic relevance for a range of actors in peacetime, and why a need for such networks does in fact exist. This analysis is based on original interview material, mainly with ex-combatants, obtained during my fieldwork in Liberia between 2009 and 2013.

Rebel transformation and the informal reality

To understand how and why rebel networks do not simply vanish in the transition from war to peace despite post-conflict initiatives such as DDR processes several different aspects of the contemporary post-war situation in Liberia need to be analysed. Hidden or explicit motives of other actors, in addition to the ex-combatants themselves, such as the Liberian political or economic elite, formal security institutions or ordinary Liberian citizens, for why they might wish networks of former combatants to stay organised, also need to be examined. However, to understand why rebel networks can, *and do*, reappear specifically in the shape of informal security networks post-war the approach used in this dissertation is to acknowledge that the often-neglected informal security context first of all needs to be understood and put into focus. Accordingly, the examples are numerous of how formal security institutions have proven unable, or even unwilling, to provide its citizens with basic security in contemporary Africa. Mistrust in these formal institutions and authorities have made people turn to alternative solutions to cope with their everyday lives and safeguard their basic human security. This situation also applies to Liberia. The political situation in Liberia in terms of security, with weak formal security institutions with low capacity and a history of predatory behaviour, has created an environment where informal initiatives for security and protection are called upon. In such an environment informal security groups have a natural platform. William Reno in his research on post-war West African militia networks concludes that the very weak state administrations in West African countries have left leaders of wartime rebel

factions with considerable space to manoeuvre their organisational and personal skills and connections from fighting to peacetime pursuits.⁹ Reno in his examples show how wartime fighting units can re-emerge as commercial organisations or community-based NGOs for example, which demonstrate the ex-fighters' and their leaders adaptive capacity to survive the end of war and to find new positions by turning wartime bonds to commercial advantage.¹⁰

In the case studies below, based on my interviews and findings from fieldwork in Liberia, I will illustrate how networks based on former rebel structures are organised and operate in the informal security arena, while attempting to describe the rationale behind these lingering features of war. By doing so I intend to give further examples of how the adaptive capacity of former rebel soldiers, which Reno refers to, is utilised by various Liberian actors. I will show why and how re-mobilisation, or maintenance, of rebel networks could be consistent with the interests of former rebels, key influential actors within the Liberian elite, formal state institutions as well as ordinary Liberian citizens, whether this be for political, economic, social or security reasons.

Delimitations and definitions

Post-war rebel networks

This thesis will not examine the situation of Liberia's ex-combatants in general. The civil wars left Liberia with many men and women who fall within this category. They have faced a range of different post-war experiences as ex-combatants, depending on factors such as gender, age, family situation and period of time spent as a rebel soldier. Such considerations have increasingly been researched and discussed, particularly in relation to the evolvement of DDR practice, as for instance James Pugel's survey study of 590 Liberian ex-combatants with

⁹ William Reno, "Transforming West African Militia Networks for Postwar Recovery", *Comparative Social Research*, Vol. 27 (127-149), 2010, p. 134.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

particular focus on the DDDR programme's impact on reintegration.¹¹ Given the studies already available on the ex-combatant population as a whole, I have for the purpose of this study chosen to focus more specifically on a distinct category of ex-combatants. Here, I am interested in ex-combatants for whom the networks established among them and their fellow combatants during the war in different ways remain important. I am interested in former rebel soldiers who have actively maintained their links to each other, or other former combatants, in an organised but not formalised manner. The former combatants examined here are those who have done so not only by keeping in contact, but also by relying on each other, and in particular on their former commanders, in the hope of securing a living while using in post-war times their organisational structures and skills acquired as rebels. I herein refer to these structures as *post-war rebel networks*. With such a focus I will thereby move beyond an analysis of ex-combatants' DDR process experiences, which is already a well-research area. Furthermore, the decision to focus on this category of ex-combatants, instead of the ex-combatant population in Liberia as a whole, is simply due to the fact that these are the ones we fear. Organised ex-combatants are those who are believed to be willing to mobilise for renewed violence or even warfare. It is therefore of vital importance that these structures, their dynamics and reasons for existing are analysed and better understood. In the subsequent case studies, the nature of such networks will therefore be further examined. The case studies will illustrate the mutual dependence that exists between former rebels and former commanders within such networks and why these structures have become important to the individuals attached to them. The case studies will explore what I refer to as an "ex-combatant identity", which the individuals within these networks have chosen to, or have felt forced to, preserve, an identity that other ex-combatants, not attached to post-war rebel networks, may have chosen or managed to escape.

I have chosen to use the term post-war *rebel* networks, rather than *ex-combatant* networks, simply because the ex-combatants within the structures I have followed mainly have a past as rebel soldiers. Some informants have, during periods of the war, also been army soldiers, though none of them have a purely military background, which will be discussed in more detail

¹¹ James Pugel, "What the Fighters Say: A survey of Ex-combatants in Liberia", February – March 2006, United Nations Development Programme, Joint Intervention Unit, April, 2007.

in the section on methodology. The term rebel may in some contexts be considered controversial since it is seen to carry a normative negative connotation. Armed groups may want to distance themselves from the term, arguing that they are not opposing a legitimate and functioning government. However, in this case, the status of the armed opposing groups as rebels has not been specifically contested, neither publicly in Liberia, nor by my informants, which is why I have chosen to use this term as an analytical category.

However, as background for analysing post-war rebel networks, a brief discussion on the wider concept of *informal networks* and its use in Liberia is required. As a definition I borrow Kate Meagher's description of social networks, in her analysis of African informal economies, as "...informally organised arrangements based on social ties..."¹², when discussing such constellations. As Meagher notes, a focus on networks allows for an examination of the capacity of social forces to provide a flexible regulatory framework embedded in popular relations of solidarity and trust.¹³ Meagher further points out that more insecure economic actors in African societies tend to diversify their social networks in the hope of maximising access to assistance. This involves the maintenance of existing kinship and community networks, as well as the formation of new networks by joining associations, credit societies, religious groups and social clubs.¹⁴ In this thesis, networks are understood as constellations individuals are drawn to out of security concerns, whether these are economic, physical, or social security concerns. As Lourenco-Lindell, in her analysis of informal livelihoods and social networks from an urban West-African perspective has pointed out, the building of networks evolves around daily survival. In African urban settings, daily survival builds extensively on networks of personal relationships through which the poor get access to a living space, a plot to cultivate, credit and other forms of vital assistance when in need, Lourenco-Lindell finds. In difficult environments of constant insufficiency and uncertainty other kinds of entitlements need to be activated, she notes. Links with others are established to deal with crises and in this process people generate expectations between one another, develop claims and create

¹² Kate Meagher, "Social capital or analytical liability? Social networks and African informal economies", in *Global networks*, 5, 3, (2005), 217-238, p.219.

¹³ Ibid. p. 218.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 230.

rules to govern relations and behaviour.¹⁵ Accordingly, individuals in all societies and contexts are in need of networks, but in more challenging environments, the need for such informal arrangements are even greater. In Liberia, as elsewhere, people rely on a variety of informal networks. People can be tied together by kinship, friendship, ethnicity, gender, geography, shared past experiences and present common daily challenges, and much more. The informal nature of these networks simply imply that they are not formally registered and documented constellations. Instead they provide flexible frameworks for its individuals, yet not without expectations or even informal rules on how to behave and relate to each other. An important delimitation in this study is the focus on the post-war rebel networks which for a Liberian ex-combatant can be one of many informal networks they rely on for economic, physical or social security concerns.

Ethnicity as a factor within post-war rebel networks?

As stated above, individuals form informal networks with basis around a variety of factors. Ethnicity is one among many such factors that can glue people together and create a collective identification. Yet, when it comes to Africa, and maybe African wars in particular, there is a tendency to overemphasise ethnicity, often at the expense of other important factors, when looking to understand of how people are organised. Ethnicity is at risk of being the only thing we see, both when looking at root causes for conflict or when mapping networks people rely on. It might therefore be relevant to specifically bring out the question of ethnicity when discussing different common identities that can bring an informal network together. For example, as pointed out by Braathen et al., ethnicity does play a role in most sub-Saharan African conflicts, in the sense that ethnic affiliation often structures the composition of groups in conflict. Still, they point out, it is too simplistic to characterise wars in Africa as tribal. A focus on politics and economics, could reveal how struggles for power and resources at marginal sites are turned in to ethnic conflicts. Conflicting groups and armed factions must be understood in the light of the socio-economic context in which they operate, and within this

¹⁵ Ilda Lourenco-Lindell, "Walking the Tight Rope – Informal Livelihoods and Social Networks in a West-African City", Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, 2002, p. 22.

context ethnicity is only one among many variables, they argue.¹⁶ In Liberia, ethnicity has played an important role in different ways. As will be discussed in the conflict background chapter, Liberians have been oppressed, or been given advantages, along ethnic lines since the very foundation of the Liberian state. During the wars the ethnic divisions were also reflected in the mobilisation of armed factions. This of course has had an effect on post-war rebel networks as these structures reflect the organisation arrangements during the wars, and thereby similar ethnic divisions. Yet, the assumption here is that ethnic identity is but one of people's identifications. Being an ex-combatant may be another. Within post-war rebel networks, as we shall see in this thesis, it is around the latter identification that individuals have organised themselves. This does not mean that other identities, or other informal networks glued together by other factors of common identification, are unimportant to them. Different identities do not necessarily compete with each other; they simply might be of different significance depending on the specific context an individual is positioned within at a specific moment in time. Accordingly, the focus for this study is on the ex-combatant identity within post-war rebel networks, before other shared identities such as ethnicity or other factors.

Informal security groups

Another important delimitation of the research here is that focus will not be on post-war rebel networks as such, as these constellations in theory could be involved in a variety of activities, as seen for instance in Reno's research referred to above. Of special interest for this thesis are post-war rebel networks that have re-emerged as *informal security groups*, either due to their ability to act as security providers or because of their violent potential. From an analytical perspective, a post-war rebel network is thereby understood as an overall constellation of ex-combatants who have preserved, or established, links to each other, in a patron-client manner, based on wartime structures, while the informal security groups examined here instead are the smaller constellations that emerge within these networks, mobilised for a specific task or during a specific event.

¹⁶ Einar Braathen, Morten Boås and Gjermund Sæther, "Ethnicity Kills? – The Politics of War, Peace and Ethnicity in SubSaharan Africa", MacMillan Press Ltd, 2000, pp. 3-4.

It should also be noted that it has not been my purpose to map out the size of these networks or examine how many ex-combatants are attached to them. Currently there are no studies identifying how many post-war rebel networks exist, or the number of ex-combatants within them, active in contemporary Liberia, or during the years following the end of the war. But in addition to post-war rebel networks within the informal security sector and the illegal rubber industry, as described in this thesis, we do know that such networks have been involved in the exploitation of the country's diamond, timber and gold resources.¹⁷ However, this is rather a qualitative piece of research where I am interested in how these structures function and in the mechanisms and dynamics that tie the ex-combatants together. In the following case studies, however, we will discover that post-war rebel networks can be of substantial size. In chapter four, we find that, as many as an estimated 5,000 ex-combatants from such a network initially controlled Guthrie Rubber Plantation in 2006. Even if such a large number of organised ex-combatants in informal security groups is an exception, this example illustrates the ability of such networks to generate large groups when the opportunity is given, as they are not formalised static groups but fluid and flexible constellations that continuously change in size and composition.

As we will discover, not all of the individuals active in these groups are ex-combatants. However, as the groups I will focus on will be composed mainly of ex-combatants, it will be interesting to analyse why these networks also attract non-ex-combatants, even though the "ex-combatant identity" is often stigmatised. Furthermore, the members of the different informal security groups in focus here are not divided on the basis of former rebel movements. As Danny Hoffman has demonstrated, in Liberia as in so many other contexts, the factionalism that divided the combatants during the war made little difference to them in the post-war period.¹⁸ As my case studies will show, ex-combatants from opposing rebel groups now

¹⁷ See for example the Global Witness report, "Timber, Taylor, Soldier, Spy: How Liberia's uncontrolled resource exploitation, Charles Taylor's manipulation and the re-recruitment of ex-combatants are threatening regional peace", 2005.

¹⁸ Danny Hoffman, "The City as Barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities", in *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 22, Issue 3, 2007, pp. 400-428, p. 417.

sometimes live and work together, having in common only their ex-combatant identity regardless of former affiliations.

In which way, then, are former rebel networks and chains of command important for the emerging informal security groups examined here? As will be demonstrated in my case studies, the roles and positions of former commanders within these emerging groups are important aspects for understanding this. Within each group presented here I will focus on a couple of key former rebel generals who either have the roles as leaders of these informal security groups or possess other influential positions. It is around them that the informal security groups are built. Many of their followers are also ex-combatants they commanded during the wars. With the former rebel generals as key nodes in these groups, chains of commands can be maintained and re-used in the overall post-war rebel networks, and ex-combatants from different factions, or even non-ex-combatants, can easily merge with them. However, having been a successful commander during the war does not automatically transform an ex-combatant into a successful leader or mobiliser of a post-war rebel network. Only those who have simultaneously been able to preserve or establish connections to the elite as well as lower-rank ex-combatants have managed to do so.

In the subsequent case studies of this thesis I will follow individuals in post-war rebel networks during specific events or situations. We will see them mobilised as “recycled” rebels in times of regional wars and crisis, as informal security providers for economic motives or political purposes post-war, but we will also meet them when there is no specific event that an informal security group could be mobilised for, in order to fully examine the relevance of post-war rebel networks and ex-combatant identity in contemporary Liberia. The focus on individuals within these networks is of special importance because the groups emerging from these networks are not static. Instead their constitution may change over time or depending on the task they are to execute, which reveals the range of activities groups of ex-combatants can be involved in when it comes to informal security provision. Yet, former rebel commanders in particular will remain central, and often constant, characters in these networks, which is why special attention will be given to such individuals in this dissertation.

As these case studies will show, these groups after the war did not re-emerge only once, for a single purpose and task. These groups constantly adapt, by taking on new tasks and changing their purpose, depending on the current security political situation in Liberia and the motives of actors within the Liberian elite who are looking to use their services. The case studies will show how the leaders within post-war rebel networks (often, but not always, former rebel commanders) can navigate among the elite and individual influential actors to find new roles and tasks for ex-combatants and informal security groups emerging from their networks, highlighting their adaptive capacity. I will, for example, present post-war rebel networks involved in the provision of local informal security for individuals and communities (such as vigilantism), while showing how members of the same network, due to the connections of their leader, later could re-emerged as informal security providers during the 2011 elections. The case studies will show how post-war rebel networks have been involved in informal security provision due to political or commercial interests, but also how they are maintained for social reasons. Taking a point of departure in several examples from these case studies, I will suggest that moving from perpetrator to protector, no matter how contradictory it may sound, might often be a natural progression for ex-combatants, given the opportunity.

Methodology

This dissertation relies upon empirical material from fieldwork in Liberia, mainly concentrated in the capital Monrovia in Montserrado County and the area and villages around the rubber plantation in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties. Fieldwork for this qualitative analysis was conducted in different periods normally of one to two months at a time between 2009 and 2013. The most important contribution to this material is original data consisting of in-depth and unstructured interviews that I carried out with Liberian ex-combatants, but the analysis also draws upon interviews and private discussions I had with other Liberians without a combatant past, UN and humanitarian workers in the country, and more general field observations. In this section I will present the empirical material in more detail as well as the research design by discussing the selection of the Liberian case, specific case studies and by

introducing the main informants, as well as the methodological challenges that may come with such a fieldwork-based research approach.

Conducting ethnographic research in a post-conflict environment

As an outsider and observer of the post-conflict reality in Liberia, being in field is the most important aspect of my research. Spending time with ex-combatants that have 'made use' of their rebel past in new informal security constellations, discussing their views on security and insecurity, everyday life and work, their thoughts on their wartime past and hopes and dreams about the future has been the very essence of my fieldwork and the foundation for writing this thesis. Observing how these individuals and groups are organised, their interaction with the Liberian elite, key political and other influential actors, formal security institutions and ordinary citizens, their strategies, aims and methods has been my approach in order to gain an understanding of the dynamics of the informal security groups emerging from post-war rebel networks. Researching actors and networks operating in the informal arena is not as straightforward as for instance analysing formal security institutions. These networks and their links to the official state are often kept hidden.¹⁹ Former rebel commanders may for instance still have influence over networks of ex-combatants, and to gain access to these networks via those former commanders may be of strategic importance for the Liberian elite for different reasons. Still, to be seen as encouraging or contributing to the maintenance of wartime structures would not be viewed in a favourable light, especially not in the eyes of the international community, which is spending considerable resources on the DDR process for example, with an eye to breaking up such structures. Most interactions between key actors within the official state apparatus or Liberian elite and former rebel soldiers or informal security networks would, therefore, only take place in the shadows. Accordingly, studying post-war rebel structures and informal security networks is not something that can be done from afar. Fieldwork and interaction with these actors has been an absolute necessity for me

¹⁹ See Jörgel and Utas, 2007, for a detailed account on why most actors within formal institutions would want to keep links to actors in the informal arena hidden as they know the importance of the official image especially in relation to Western donors.

as an outsider in order to grasp and capture some of the dynamics of power that are at display in the informal arena.

I have found anthropological research methods highly useful for this type of research. Ethnographic fieldwork, which the research herein can be categorised as, is an anthropological method that has been vital for writing this thesis. It might therefore be necessary to say a few words about ethnography as a research method. Since its origin as a particular form of knowledge about distant cultures (most often non-Western) the meaning of ethnography has been significantly expanded. Methodologies ranging from life stories to the analysis of letters and questionnaires; from autobiography to narrative analysis; from field research lasting from a few days to several years have all be considered as ethnography in different contexts. Ethnography is now not only a research method for anthropologists, it has for example also entered into the field of political science. Here it has become favoured due to an increased interest in the 'micro' dimensions of political phenomena, and a new openness to the insights of qualitative research. Ethnography within political science has been seen to highlight aspects neglected by quantitative analysis, such as how micro-politics and the complexity of everyday life affect the macro level.²⁰

While it is not hard to see the value of, and also need for, ethnographic fieldwork when studying ex-combatants and informal security structures, it begs the question of how it is then possible to gain access to these post-war rebel networks. There are several potential problems with the qualitative field-research-based approach I have chosen to use in this regard. I am an outsider, a European researcher who despite partly having a West African background, grew up far from the reality of my informants. I have not experienced war, violence, basic insecurity and extreme poverty, and I have no first-hand experience of the challenges and struggle for survival which my informants have faced both during and in the aftermath of war. Nevertheless, I am trying to understand and make sense of the post-war reality that my informants are experiencing; I am trying to understand by listening and observing. That

²⁰ Giampietro Gobo, "Ethnography", in Ed. Silverman, David, *Qualitative Research – Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*, 3rd Edition, Sage, 2011, pp. 16, 26-27.

understanding is only possible if my informants are willing to share their experiences with me, despite my being an outsider. As has been pointed out by Lee Ann Fujii amongst others, ethnographers of war and violence need to be aware of the role rumours play in periods of extreme uncertainty and insecurity, as other sources of information are often not accessible, leaving rumours to help people to make sense of the situation. For similar reasons and in the same manner, rumours can also arise about researchers, Fujii notes. Fujii was herself affected by this while conducting field research in Rwanda as some rumours indicated that her activities and interviews could be threatening to her informants and were therefore worthy of suspicion. While conducting interviews in prisons, Fujii was confronted by an informant and prisoner, who wanted to know whether she had gone to his house and tried to question his young child about the war, despite protests from the child's mother, who insisted that the child was too young to be questioned about the war. In another instance, at their third interview about the genocide, a woman nervously told Fujii about her fears, that she had heard a rumour about Fujii and her interpreter being employed by the Rwandan government, searching for individuals who had participated in the genocide. After having both denied and discussed the rumours attached to Fujii as a researcher, her informants slowly began to trust her, and over time their fears subsided. But, as Fujii points out, rumours such as these illustrate the extent to which field research is a two-way street. Not only are the researchers studying their informants; the informants, in turn, are studying them back to figure out whether this person could be a potential threat. Fujii's informants were simply trying to establish whose interests Fujii was really representing. As Fujii points out, such assessments are critical in violent and fragile settings. Rumours can reveal the source of people's fears about what is at stake if they talk to a researcher, and if they believe that the researcher is in any way a threat to them, it is clear that they will be less than forthright in interviews. If people eventually come to believe that the researcher is who she says she is, Fujii argues, people are less likely to be distrustful and will have fewer reasons to lie.²¹

²¹ Lee Ann Fujii, "Interpreting truth and lies in the stories of conflict and violence", in Ed. Chandra Lekha Sriram, John C. King, Julie A. Mertus, Olga Martin-Ortega and Johanna Herman, *Surviving Field Research – Working in violent and difficult situations*, Routledge, 2009, pp. 149-150.

Research design and empirical material

As the Liberian war finally came to an end in 2003, over 100,000 combatants were disarmed in the subsequent DDDR process. With such a significant part of the population falling within the category of *ex-combatants*, Liberia becomes a very interesting case to study when it comes to post-war rebel networks. However, not all Liberians who could be categorised as ex-combatants are studied in this dissertation. Of special interest here are ex-combatants who have preserved their wartime links to each other or attached themselves to new post-war rebel networks who actively engage in informal security activities. The attempt with this research is thereby not to construct a representative sample of all Liberian ex-combatants. The main reason for this is, as discussed earlier, that ex-combatants with preserved links to each other are often perceived as one of the most immediate threats to post-war peace and stability. The actual and potential consequences of such lingering wartime structures should therefore carefully be studied.

The decision to focus on Liberia as a single case instead of making a comparative study analysing Liberia in relation to other post-conflict settings dealing with the issues of ex-combatants is based on the purpose and nature of this dissertation. An important choice of this study has been to conduct in-depth, unstructured interviews, and to present ex-combatant narratives from key informants in more detail than a more quantitative approach would have allowed for. My informants' life stories have thereby driven the research of this dissertation in sometimes unexpected ways as their ex-combatant identity has both caused them problems as well as given them opportunities over the years I have followed them. This has also led me to the specific in-country case studies which will be presented in the chapters to come. Had the decision been to make a comparative study I would have been forced to conduct my interviews in a completely different manner. Structured interviews or surveys would for example been suitable in order to gather a similar and comparable material in each post-conflict setting, which would have been needed for a comparative study. Such studies can provide valuable information due to the broad perspective they can offer. Yet such approaches do not have the same advantage when it comes to capturing the individual stories or informants' life trajectories focused on here, which are also needed for the analysis and

understanding of important structural problems. The decision not to conduct a comparative study with in-country case studies follows the exact same logic. A comparative study could for example have been to analyse the presence of post-war rebel networks at Guthrie in relation to similar ex-combatant concentrations at Sinoe or other rubber plantations. Or for that matter in relation to other post-war rebel networks involved in illegal trade of diamonds, timber, gold and other natural resources, also much reported on in Liberia. Although such studies would surely have been interesting, a similar approach as mentioned above would have been suitable, at the expense of the valuable information that can come out of letting in-depth and unstructured interviews open up for the informants' life trajectories to orient the research. The dynamics of the post-rebel networks, and the opportunities that were given to them, has also directed my selection of case studies. The illegal rebel occupation of Guthrie rubber plantation, for example, later led to the same network's mobilisation for the 2011 elections. Another network's organised activities as vigilantes gave them the opportunity to function as informal security providers in the same elections. The chosen approach has thereby allowed me to follow these networks as opportunities rose due to their ex-combatant identity. This provides a unique insight into the post-war realities, including the opportunities and challenges, ex-combatants may face over time.

Presenting the informants

For this thesis I have chosen to present seven of my main informants more closely by using parts of their life stories from before, during, and after the war in order to better understand the networks these individuals are attached to and the post-war reality they operate in. All but one has a past as rebel soldiers during the Liberian civil wars. The man I in this thesis refer to as **Alex**²² (in chapter five), never took active part as a combatant during the years of war. Still Alex, as a former vigilante leader, has managed to establish himself post-war in the same way as other former rebel commanders within a network of ex-combatants mobilised for informal security assignments. Alex thereby becomes an important example of how a person

²² In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Alex were conducted during fieldwork in February-March and October 2009, May 2010, September-October 2011, April 2012 and February-March 2013. During each period of fieldwork Alex was met several times.

without a combatant past in some instances may find it beneficial to attach himself to a post-war rebel network.

Four of my seven main informants have also been soldiers representing the official government during periods of their lives as combatants. This illustrates how the shifting power balance during the course of wars could easily transform a soldier into a rebel and vice versa. **Michael**²³ and **Simon**²⁴ (who we meet for the first time in chapter three) started their combatant paths as soldiers by joining the AFL in 1992, mainly to find protection against Charles Taylor's rebel forces. They later became rebels, with Michael joining the rebel group LPC in 1993, while Simon and **Jacob**²⁵ (chapter 3) chose to join the other main rebel group at the time, ULIMO. Both Michael and Simon came to support the rebel movement LURD during the second Liberian civil war, from 1999 onwards, Simon as an active combatant, and Michael as a recruiter mobilising for the new rebellion. As we shall see in chapter three, Jacob was forced to change sides in 2002 and was given official status as a commander, this time during Taylor's presidency. **Malcolm's**²⁶ (chapter six) transformation, on the other hand, was the opposite of Michael and Simon's initial one, as he instead started out as a rebel in 1990 by joining Charles Taylor's NPFL. But following Taylor's election victory in 1997 Malcolm, like many other rebels on Taylor's side, was transferred from Taylor's rebel forces to the new official security unit, the SSU, after completing six months of training. After an additional training period of nine months, Malcolm came to join Taylor's notorious paramilitary force, the ATU, in 1999.

The informant referred to as **Alpha**²⁷ (chapter four), never went through the rebel/soldier transformation of the four men discussed above. Alpha instead had joined Taylor's NPFL forces in 1990 and remained loyal until Taylor took power in 1997. After that Alpha was

²³ In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Michael were conducted during fieldwork in September-October 2011, April 2012, February-March 2013. During each period of fieldwork Michael was met several times.

²⁴ In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Simon were conducted during fieldwork in October 2009, May 2010, September-October 2011 and April 2012. During each period of fieldwork Simon was met several times.

²⁵ In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Jacob were conducted during fieldwork in February-March 2013. During this period of fieldwork Jacob was met several times.

²⁶ In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Malcolm were conducted during fieldwork in September-October 2011, April 2012 and February-March 2013. During each period of fieldwork Michael was met several times.

²⁷ In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Alpha were conducted during fieldwork in October 2009, September-October 2011, April 2012. During each period of fieldwork Alpha was met several times.

installed by the Taylor regime as a security commander at the Guthrie Rubber Plantation. In 2003 Alpha went into exile in Ghana as LURD forces took over the plantation. **Abraham**²⁸ (chapter six), like Alpha, also has a past only as a rebel during his time as a combatant. Abraham joined the NPFL in 1991 and remained with them until 1994. During the second war Abraham, however, never took active part as a combatant.

By following the trajectories of these seven informants, with different backgrounds, affiliation during the war, and way of using their ex-combatant identity today, in this dissertation we will see what a life as a Liberian ex-combatant attached to a post-war rebel network can look like. Among my informants there is a variation in background that is interesting to note, while all of them are linked to the same or similar post-war structures. For instance, my informants come from opposing sides of the conflicts; altogether they represent four different rebel groups as well as the pre-war official forces and those during Taylor's time as a president, but what they now all share is their ex-combatant status (except for Alex) and their attachment to a post-war rebel network, mobilising for informal security assignments. None of my informants hide their rebel past, and they have all in different ways, with varying degrees of success, made use of their ex-combatant identity, although this identity has been a heavier burden for some than for others.

Even in post-war times these informants represent different sides, but now of a purely political conflict. While three of my informants (Michael, Simon and Alpha) were mobilised as part of a post-war rebel network in different ways to support the incumbent President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf during the 2011 Liberian elections (see chapter five), three of the remaining seven (Alex, Malcolm and Abraham) were mobilised in similar ways for the main opposition candidate, Winston Tubman. Here only one side could come out victorious, leaving the ones within the post-war rebel network of the winning candidate Ellen Johnson Sirleaf with clear benefits attached to their ex-combatant status. The losers mobilised for Tubman instead had to face how their ex-combatant identity was made an even heavier burden. Accordingly, by

²⁸ In-depth interviews and informal conversations with Abraham were conducted during fieldwork in February-March 2013. During this period of fieldwork Abraham was met several times.

following these specific informants we will be able to see examples of when an ex-combatant identity can both be beneficial and a burden. Among my informants there is a significant difference in how well these men have managed to use their ex-combatant status in order to find employment and an accepted social position post-war. This makes them interesting from a methodological perspective, as we can compare how, for example, different choices, skills and political connections make ex-combatants attached to post-war rebel networks more or less successful.

Among my six informants with a combatant past, as many as five have been rebel commanders for periods during the wars. This has been a strategic methodological choice for this study. I have chosen to mainly focus on commanders due to their special position in relation to post-war rebel networks. Former rebel commanders may have the advantage of having secured important connections both to elite actors as well as foot soldiers during times of war that can prove useful post-war. A different approach, based on ex-combatant narratives from the perspective of mainly foot soldiers would of course also have provided us with valuable information on ex-combatants within post-war rebel networks. Yet, in this dissertation I wanted to capture the unique positions former commanders can have within these networks, both as gate-keepers to, and mobilisers of, such networks, and the special dynamics generated from these actors. By focusing on their stories specifically I believe, due to their unique position within these networks, that we will have a better chance of understanding what post-war rebel networks look like, how they function, and how actors at different societal levels benefit from them. A comparative approach, where the positions of former commanders and foot soldiers are measured against each other in order to, for example, compare advantages and disadvantages of an ex-combatant identity, depending on positioning within post-war rebel networks, would be an interesting theme for future studies.

All of my main informants are men. Considering the fact that many combatants during the war were women and girls, this might seem odd. However, among the post-war rebel networks I have conducted research on, very few women have been visible. I discuss in more detail why this is so and what this could be an indicator of in chapter six.

Ethical considerations and security concerns

I started to work on this thesis in early 2011 and conducted field research in Liberia during September and October the same year. However, this was not my first period of fieldwork in Liberia or within these networks. Between 2009 and 2013 I have had the opportunity, through a number of research trips, normally spending one to two months in the country each time, to focus my research on different types of informal security groups. These groups relied mainly, or in part, on former rebel structures. They were based both in the capital Monrovia and other parts of the country. As I returned for my field research in 2011, many of my informants had gotten to know me over the years, and I believe that they therefore found it easier to trust me, allowing me an insight into their everyday lives and activities and access to their wider networks. Even though I have not had the opportunity to spend longer than a month or two at the time with my informants, I do believe that my repeated interactions with them over the years have strengthened the reliability of the information I have been given. I have had the possibility to compare information given to me at different points in time, but even more importantly, I believe that my informants find it more worthwhile to interact with me given that I have followed them for a longer period of time. Although I am still an outsider, it has made me less of a stranger.

My earlier interactions with some of these networks also made it possible for me to reflect upon developments over time and on how important political events, such as the Presidential elections of 2011, affected the dynamics of their activities and interactions. It has also given me the opportunity to examine what happens to the post-war rebel networks and the ex-combatants within them when there are no important political events or security assignments to be mobilised for. It has allowed me to follow and interview my informants in times that have been good as well as bad. I believe that the continuity of my field research over a number of years is an important, and quite rare, contribution when it comes to understanding not only post-war rebel networks and the reality for ex-combatants post-war, but also the wider context of security, and political instability in a post-war country several years after peace was declared.

Furthermore, a vital strategy of mine when conducting field research has always been to be honest and open. My informants need to know who I am, where I come from and work, for which audience I write and publish, what my research is about, and what I intend to do with stories they share with me. This is not only for ethical reasons, as my informants should be fully aware of the work I do for them to decide on whether they want to participate or not. I was always careful to ensure that I had my informants' informed consent before conducting any interviews. Such an approach is also vital for security concerns, mainly for my informants, but also for myself. Having a combatant past can be a sensitive issue in many contexts, a past that many might want to keep a secret due to the risk of stigmatisation. This has, however, not been the case with my informants. None of them hide their past as rebels from family, friends or their communities, despite the risk of stigmatisation. Yet, as has been pointed out by Elisabeth Woods amongst others, it is important to implement a "do no harm" ethic when conducting empirical research, especially in conflict zones, due to political polarisation, the presence of armed actors, the precarious security of most residents, the general unpredictability of events and the traumatisation, from violence, of combatants and civilians alike.²⁹ I believe that such an approach is vital even in post-conflict zones. Besides seeking to ensure that my informants did not run any risks by talking to me as well as making sure that they made their own informed decision to be interviewed, I have therefore chosen to keep the identities of my informants hidden by using pseudonyms instead of their real names, or rebel names, to further ensure that I would not in any way put them in danger due to my research.

Moreover, in an attempt to find answers to how and why post-war rebel networks could be relevant to the Liberian political or economic elite, I have tried to map out and follow my informants' links to key influential actors. There are additional ethical issues that need to be regarded in this type of research. As argued above, actors within the Liberian elite and the official state structures may consider collaboration with former rebel commanders and their

²⁹ Elisabeth Jean Wood, "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones", *Qualitative Sociology*, Special Issue: Political Ethnography I, 2006, 29:373-386, p. 373.

networks to be of strategic importance, yet there would be strong incentives for the elite not to display these informal interactions in front of the international community, which is spending considerable resources on demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants. However, in Liberia, the links between the formal elite and informal networks is nothing but an open secret. Of course, this is nothing the Liberian government would talk publicly about or give an account of in front of the international community. Yet, cooperation with informal power structures is an essential part of the political culture in Liberia, a fact that, at least to ordinary Liberians, is far from a secret. This, I would argue, implies that the information shared by my informants within post-war rebel structures is not considered a threat towards actors in power in Liberia. Nevertheless, making sure that I protect my informants from any possible harm connected to their being linked to actors within the Liberian elite is an additional reason why I have chosen not to reveal their names in this dissertation.

Coming back to the importance of being honest and open towards informants about the work one does as a researcher, I have always considered this to be an important part of my own safety in field. As Fujii discusses, dealing with rumours is an unavoidable part of doing research, and one should always keep in mind that informants are often equally interested in gaining information about the person who interviewing them. I noticed early on that my informants were always well informed about my work and about whom I had talked to in field. Not only due to the information I had been careful to give them regarding whom I was and what my purpose of my research was, but also because they were good at informing each other of my work and whereabouts in Liberia. One incident illustrating this was the first time I met with the informant I herein call Jacob. I had never met him before but had heard of him from another informant who had also given me his number so that I could contact him. When we first met I started, as I always do, by introducing myself and my research, but Jacob did not seem that interested and interrupted me several times. "Yes, yes I know all this!", Jacob told me a bit annoyed. He told me that he obviously had known who I was and what I was doing in Liberia for a long time. Jacob said that he remembered the first time I came to the Guthrie Rubber Plantation several years earlier, a place where I knew Jacob not had been active. He could account for whom I had met and what my research had been about. Jacob continued and referred to people I had met and interviews that I had held over the years, and even

though I knew that my informants were always well informed about my business I was still a bit surprised at the level of detail that Jacob could provide. This, however, made a great start of our relationship. I felt early on that Jacob never feared talking to me or had reason to be suspicious in any way. The fact that he initially knew more about me than I about him perhaps contributed to the relaxed atmosphere I always felt when we met. Above all, I believe that the trust I have gained amongst my informants over the years is strongly related to the fact that I have always been careful to let people know the purpose of my field research and that they therefore have had less need to be mistrustful of my intentions.

Ethnographic fieldwork is to large extent about listening. When it comes to the 'act of listening' Carolyn Nordstrom has pointed out that it may seem surprising that anyone conducting research in a violent context or among traumatised people can elicit personal information of any kind. It is often presumed that war provokes antipathy towards all outsiders and that people therefore will guard their silence due to the fear of how the researchers might use the information they collect. As Nordstrom also states, these arguments are in many ways valid, yet they are balanced by a need to talk and communicate experiences related to violence. Words serve to give voice to the unspeakable and make it somewhat more controllable, Nordstrom notes. As many of her informants expressed: "we are glad you finally came to ask us our story; up until now, everyone has come to tell us what our story is." Nordstrom draws the important conclusion that it is in the act of listening that we can begin to understand the existence of those who speak.³⁰ Even though my research has not been carried out in a warzone, I believe that the lessons drawn by Nordstrom are equally relevant to conducting research in post-war Liberia, as my informants have been, and still are, affected by the war they actively took part in. Many experiences will not be shared with an outsider; still I have found that many of my informants have a will to share experiences both from the time of war and their present everyday reality. And I believe that there are important lessons to be learned from their stories.

³⁰ Nordstrom, 1997, pp. 79-80.

Conducting interviews

In the act of listening, the concept of interviewing has been central for my work. Unstructured interviewing, as my fieldwork to a large part is composed of, has been defined as going on all the time, and at any location – in people’s homes, while walking along a road, hanging out in bars or waiting for a bus.³¹ Unstructured interviews are based on a clear plan that the interviewer keeps in mind, but they are at the same time characterised by a minimum of control over people’s responses. The idea of such interviews is to get people to open up and to let them express themselves and their experiences on their own terms, and at their own pace. Such ethnographic interviewing is best used when you have ample time, as during long-term fieldwork, and when informants can be interviewed on many separate occasions.³² I have always felt that unstructured or informal interviews – herein understood as a non-structured conversation taking place in an everyday situation such as sharing a taxi, having lunch, taking a walk in the neighbourhood, while preparing food or resting in the shade for a while – have been most suitable for me as a researcher, and for this specific topic and context. As argued by Bernard, amongst others, nothing can beat unstructured interviewing if you want to know about the lived experiences of fellow human beings: what it is like to survive war, or how to get through each day when you have a child dying, or how it feels to be forced to flee your country. In such cases, structured or semi-structured interviews can feel somewhat unnatural, Bernard points out, and highly structured interviewing can even get in the way of your ability to communicate freely with key informants. Unstructured interviews can instead be more suitable for studying sensitive issues, Bernard argues, and are particularly useful in the context of armed conflict.³³ It is of course also a matter of taste, the personality of the researcher, and an assessment of the situation at hand that makes us choose what research methods to use in the field.

Conducting fieldwork and even interviewing, when done in this way, is never one-way communication, where I listen and observe while my informants simply answer questions and

³¹ Bernard, H. Russell, *Research Methods in Anthropology – Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Fourth edition, AltaMira Press, 2006, p. 210.

³² Ibid. p. 211.

³³ Ibid. p. 213.

provide me with information. It is instead a constant interaction, where my informants naturally want to know who they have in front of them. As I have taken part of their lived experiences and life stories, they have often wanted to hear about mine. They have wanted to know who my parents are and where they come from. They have enjoyed listening to the story of my father: how he as a young man crossed the border into Liberia in the '60s; how he worked as a teacher in Kakata to make a living and made his way to Monrovia and lived on Newport Street for some time while dreaming of one day reaching Europe. They have laughed with recognition and called him a 'hustler' like themselves, a brave man with big dreams and little means. They have wanted to know about my upbringing in Sweden, what I have studied and how I live. They have wondered and found it odd and ridiculous that I have my mother's surname, and they have laughed at the fact that year after year, and despite being as old as in my late 20s and early 30s, I still have not "managed" to get married. As they have shared parts of their life stories with me, they have also heard about mine. And why should they not? They have invited me to their homes, presented me to their families, I have seen where they work and been invited to spend time with them and their friends when they just hang around. I have been invited to church and listened to one of my informants' choir concerts. I have been mocked for refusing to participate myself in the big weightlifting competition at the beach that I attended, and which some of my informants had organised. They have scolded me for travelling alone up-country and they have laughed at me for waiting half a day on the floor of a crowded Eco-Bank near West Point to have an interview with one of my informants who, unfortunately for him, was also stuck there on the floor. They have talked to me when life has been good to them, and when they have felt miserable and angry at society and the world. They have shared important pieces of themselves and their everyday life with me, so why should they not also know something about me? For me fieldwork has mostly been about trying to understand the lives of my informants and the structures they are part of by listening, asking and observing. But it has also been about sharing a piece of who I am with them. Fieldwork is constant interaction, and I believe that it was only through this exchange that fruitful information could come about from my research in Liberia.

Searching for the 'truth'?

When it comes to ethnographic fieldwork and conducting interviews, one question that is sometimes brought up is whether one can assure that informants are telling the 'truth' when being interviewed. As Fujii has pointed out, most researchers use well-known techniques such as triangulating different sources, to discover lies in order to get closer to the 'truth'. In my case this was mainly done by comparing information and details given to me in private by different informants and to always double-check details such as dates, numbers and events with different sources including other informants, official documents and reports as well as other research within the same field. Since I also met my informants several times over the years I had the opportunity to ask the same questions and compare answers by the same source given at different occasions. But as Fujii notes, not all stories lend themselves to the determination of truth. For example, one cannot put people's beliefs about how the world works through a truth test. Similarly, Fujii argues, the value of people's narrations about their experiences of violence – what they saw, did, felt or heard – does not necessarily lie in their factual accuracy or objective truths, but in the meaning that the narrator gives particular events and moments. The stories place the narrator in a larger context, and thereby even fabrications, embellishments and interventions become revealing, Fujii states.³⁴ As the narratives of my informants from chapter to chapter drive this thesis forward, it is important to consider this. I have done what I can to control the accuracy of the narratives given here by triangulating different sources and by comparing information given to me about the same matter at different points in time. But all my informants' stories are important even if some of the information proved to be incorrect, because they reveal a lot, not only about the individuals themselves, but also about the wider context and the reality they see and face every day.

The importance of in-depth individual stories

Each case study presented in this thesis is an attempt to contribute to the understanding of post-war rebel networks, and to the ability of ex-combatant to transform, adapt and make use

³⁴ Fujii, 2009, p. 151.

of the present post-war security and political situation. My methodological starting point for examining these sustained rebel structures is the former rebels within the informal security groups themselves. They are also the most central characters in my research. Their views, reasons, motives and rationales for taking part in post-war rebel networks are important aspects I seek to understand. For each case study, I have mainly relied on a few key informants. I have tried to follow them closely during my time in the field, and during each period of field work I have interviewed them repeatedly. One informant has often led me to another, which has allowed me to follow important links and thereby better understand how post-war rebel networks are composed, and how the individual members relate to each other. Such an approach can be called snowball or chain sampling, where the informants are used to identify critical cases or informants who have a great deal of information about a phenomenon. This approach allows the researcher to follow a chain of contacts in order to identify and accumulate critical cases. Often a few key informants or cases will be mentioned multiple times and take on additional importance in using this method.³⁵ This method is not likely to lead to a representative sample, but it can be highly useful dealing with sensitive issues or informal networks such as the ones studied here. With such a method access can be gained in areas otherwise closed to outsiders and among informants who without the facilitation of previous informants would most likely be reluctant to participate in such studies. As I have discussed above, my informants have showed me a glimpse of their everyday life by letting me spend time with them where they work, are active or even live. In private discussions, rather than structured interviews, I have tried to capture their experiences, which my case studies build upon. I have also discussed my research questions with people closely connected to my key informants and observed the internal interaction and dynamics within these networks for an even more nuanced picture of these ex-combatants' post-war reality.

It has been a strategic choice to mainly focus on a few key individuals. However, such an approach has its limitations. More quantitatively oriented studies, where a large population of ex-combatants are interviewed instead, have the advantage of drawing more general conclusions. Research based for example on survey studies can present findings based on the

³⁵ "Qualitative Research Guidelines Project." July 2006, available at: <http://www.qualres.org/HomeSnow-3816.html>

responses to a number of specific questions addressed to the ex-combatants in relation to their present situation. Such findings can provide valuable statistics and reveal trends in ex-combatants' post-war life situations or attitudes, etc. On the other hand, the strength of the type of qualitative research which is conducted in this study is, to my mind, that it has allowed me to engage with my informants' life stories on a deeper level than if I had chosen to focus on a larger population of ex-combatants within post-war rebel networks. Furthermore, in using quantitative approaches and focusing on a large population there is a risk that we do not see the individuals within the statistics. The ex-combatants can become just another anonymous, dehumanised post-war category. In other words, the ex-combatants become nothing more than *ex-combatants*, instead of individuals with the ex-combatant identity as one of their many identities and social roles. In this thesis I wanted to give my informants' narratives enough space to diminish the risk of reducing them to this single identity. Additionally, it is my belief that we can benefit from more in-depth interviews in order to also understand the more structural problems connected to insecurity and instability that a country like Liberia faces post-war, while at the same time better understand the more general mechanisms contributing to the continued relevance of post-war rebel networks.

Most of us would agree that individual stories, as those told by the ex-combatants in this dissertation, are of importance as they contribute to a more textured understanding of what war is and means for individual human beings, even at a personal level, as they take us further and beyond war as a mere battle between political actors in a national or international context. However, what is often forgotten is that such individual stories are much more than that. In fact, these individual incidences that such stories bear witness to, have strategic implications that could change our understanding of war. They are important pieces of the puzzle in explaining not only the course of war but also the outcome of war altogether. Jacob's story, which will be presented in chapter two, illustrates this phenomenon. Here Jacob, an imprisoned combatant under Charles Taylor's presidency, during the second Liberian civil war, is confronted by Taylor himself. Jacob is released under the precondition that he joins Taylor's forces as a commander of one of his units. Why Taylor is reaching out to an individual combatant who seemingly is without any power, as he at this point in time has been imprisoned for treason for years, we can only speculate. But the important part of the story is

that he does. The President of Liberia, and the most important representative of one of the parties of war, personally reaches out to an individual rebel soldier on the enemy side. Accordingly, Taylor, for whatever reasons, finds an imprisoned enemy rebel soldier to be of strategic importance. Here I would argue, as is discussed in more detail in chapter two, that Taylor realised that this man, like so many other combatants, had strategic relevance even as an individual, as he is part of larger networks, networks that can, and do, affect the course of war. By reaching out to (or manipulating) individuals, their extended networks might also be affected. If we, in political science, international relations, war studies or military strategy, forget to search for these individual stories in our research, we will fail to see important mechanisms affecting the course and outcome of war. We will fail to see how actors, even at the very highest political levels, are connected to individual combatants on the ground, and we will ultimately end up with an incomplete understanding of war. This, I would argue, is also true for understanding post-war and peacetime logics in a society like the Liberian one. As the case studies of this dissertation will show, individuals, and in this case often ex-combatants, seemingly far removed from the centre of political power, are intimately connected to official actors of power, creating a mutual dependence with political implications that we not should underestimate.

Gender matters – in methodology?

There is one question I have repeatedly been asked over the years when it comes to my research on ex-combatants, a question that can be expressed differently but that always ends up having the same meaning: but how does it affect your work that you are a woman? The question has at times been related to whether my informants, who most often are men, feel comfortable in talking to a woman about their personal experiences of war, violence or security. On other occasions the question has simply been related to whether these men feel comfortable talking to a woman in the first place. But regardless of whether the question relates to conversations about violence or daily life, the point of the matter is the same: whether my gender can have implications for their answers or even their willingness to give honest accounts of their experiences. In my mind, I think the most interesting thing about this issue is why I get these questions while my male colleagues generally do not. We all know that

gender matters. Still, I have heard few, if any, discussions on what implications we could expect to encounter when male researchers are interviewing or conducting studies with male informants in the field of war and violence. Most researchers in this field are men, as are most informants. But the gender of the researchers tends to be invisible or even treated as insignificant, unless they in fact are women. For this reason, we cannot know for sure what, if any, implications the gender of the researcher has on the research produced when it comes to, in this case, the specific matter of ex-combatants in Liberia. Accordingly, I obviously cannot know for certain how my research would have been different if I were a man, just as my male colleagues cannot know for sure what implications it would have, had they been women. Here we lack comparative studies, probably because such questions are seldom asked when men are the ones doing the research. I can therefore only speculate on the significance of my gender when it comes to the result of my research. But since I so often have been asked the question, I, unlike most men in the same situation, I suspect, have been forced to think about these issues. And I have never seen the fact that I am a woman as an obstacle in anything from gaining access to my informants or their willingness to share their stories and experiences with me or trusting me. If anything I have considered my gender to be an advantage, not despite of prevalent gender norms, but maybe due to them. Gender norms shape the way we understand the world and what we interpret to be typical or even appropriate female or male roles or behaviour. Since men, historically and today, have had the prerogative to interpret and articulate how we are to understand the world, they naturally also have had more training in articulating their own stories and experiences. Women, on the other hand, have been expected to listen. Accordingly, from a gender perspective, male informants may find it quite natural not only to articulate their own experiences but also to do so in front of a female listener, maybe even more so than in front of a male listener. Since I have also had the opportunity to interview many female ex-combatants in the past,³⁶ I at least have an advantage in comparing the challenges in gaining access to women's stories versus men's, and I have found significant differences. Due to gender norms of appropriate female behaviour, female ex-combatants may not be as willing to talk about their own experiences of using violence for instance, but gender norms may also prevent women from expressing their stories, and especially to strangers, which researchers often are, in general. Women have been

³⁶ Mariam Persson, "‘In Their Eyes We’ll Always be Rebels’ – A Minor Field Study of Female Ex-combatants in Sierra Leone", *Minor Field Study Series*, No. 50, Uppsala University, Development Studies, 2005.

taught not to take as much space and to guard their stories more carefully. Consequently, gender matters, and should not be disregarded in methodological considerations even if we cannot know for sure how gender norms affect the outcome of research in general, or in this specific case.

Outline of the thesis

In this dissertation we will follow my informants' paths from rebel soldiers to ex-combatants attached to post-war rebel networks mobilising for different informal security assignments. The main focus is naturally on these ex-combatants' activities and lives post-war. Here I have therefore focused on a few specific events to illustrate how post-war rebel networks function and operate, as well as described interests contributing to and calling for them to remain mobilised. The cases come in chronological order, revealing how these networks have remained relevant despite the years passing since the end of war. The following chapter, **chapter two**, will however provide the theoretical framework for this thesis where I look in particular on post-war rebel networks and vigilantism. The literature review of this chapter will give some insight into the informal exercise of power and provision of security, with a specific West African focus.

This, then, is a thesis on post-war rebel networks and the forces and mechanisms allowing, and calling for, ex-combatants to preserve and maintain their wartime links to each other. Naturally, the main emphasis herein is on *post-war* Liberia and the years following the declaration of peace in 2003. Yet, the case studies of this thesis will commence elsewhere. The first example of how post-war rebel networks can be used differs from the following case studies in that I here show how such a network was used for renewed warfare and how rebels were recycled in the West African region following the end of the first Liberian civil war. In **chapter three** we are thereby taken back in time to the emergence of the Liberian civil war in 1989 and will continue through the turbulent and violent years that followed in the whole Mano River region up until the end of war. Through the stories of three young Liberian men in particular we will witness how war and crisis could transform lives, and in this case, from

sons of AFL soldiers, to soldiers, rebels, commanders, regional warriors and eventually ex-combatants. It should be noted that this chapter substantially differs from the preceding case studies, because as these subsequent examples will illustrate, post-war rebel networks and ex-combatants are mostly *not* used in their capacity as combatants or with any obvious attempt to start new warfare. On the contrary, in this chapter, we will discover how rebels were “recycled” (or recycled themselves) specifically due to their combat experiences and preserved networks, for regional warfare. Michael, Simon and Jacob’s stories are at the very centre of this chapter, allowing us to understand the importance of post-war rebel networks for its individual members, but also for the regional elite as war and crisis ranged not only in Liberia, but also in Sierra Leone and Guinea at this point in time. Through these young Liberian men’s trajectories, in this chapter we will move across West African borders and discover how the mobility of rebels and their networks, in addition to the antagonism, or loyalty, between the ruling political actors in the region, entangled the conflicts to such a degree that it was impossible to say where one conflict ended and the other one began, or whether the different conflicts in fact just were one great Mano River war, with distinct battlefields.

The case study devoted to the Guthrie Rubber Plantation (or Sime Darby as it later came to be known), where ex-combatants and post-war rebel networks have been present since 2003, presented in **chapter four** shows how political and commercial interests as well as security concerns and disappointment in the DDRR process have contributed to the maintenance of wartime structures at this location. The choice of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation is important for a variety of reasons. This case initially shows how a post-war rebel network could use their wartime organisational structure to take over and control such a large and financially important location as this plantation was. This case reveals not only how this network operates in field but also how it was connected to the highest political and financial elite of Liberia, enabling its continued activities for years. Furthermore, this case also illustrates how former rebels can be transformed into security providers under the right circumstances.

The developments at the plantation, from the time of war up until the present, show how post-war rebel networks have been of strategic importance to the ruling political elite but also

how former key rebel commanders strategically have been able to preserve and use their influence gained during the war. Once again particularly due to the narratives of individual ex-combatants – in this chapter Michael, Simon and Alpha – we will discover how a post-war rebel network can be used and how an informal security group can emerge from it. Furthermore, this chapter will also offer a discussion of negative but also potentially positive aspects of having post-war rebel networks involved in informal security provision. This case study will also illuminate how formal and informal security provision is intimately interlinked in a post-conflict country like Liberia, and consider the consequences of these overlaps and interconnections.

The third case study, in **chapter five**, will give examples of how the 2011 elections in Liberia affected the dynamics of post-war rebel networks as informal security providers. The 2011 Liberian elections were chosen as a case study partly to illustrate how post-war rebel networks had remained relevant even as long as eight years after the end of war. By showing how the main political candidates for the presidential elections mobilised post-war rebel networks for political support and informal security provision shows that the elite still sees them as a force to be reckoned with. By also showing the advantages ex-combatants on the winning side gained compared to the disadvantages faced by the ex-combatants on the losing side, in this chapter I make even clearer the importance of being connected to the right network post-war.

For this case study I have followed ex-combatants in support of the candidates who, ultimately, were the most important candidates to the 2011 Liberian elections: the incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf from the Unity Party (UP) and Winston Tubman, presidential candidate from the Congress of Democratic Change (CDC), before, during and after the elections. The Liberian presidential elections will work to illustrate both how the political elite used networks of ex-combatants for different purposes, including informal security provision and to mobilise votes, as well as how the ex-combatants themselves made use of this political event. This chapter will also give examples of how post-war rebel networks have continued to adapt over time, taking on different tasks depending on opportunity and circumstance. This adaptation will be evident as the key mobiliser of the network supporting Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

during the 2011 elections had previously been one of the most important figures among the informal security providers at the Guthrie Rubber Plantation discussed above, while the leader of the network supporting Winston Tubman had also been active as a vigilante leader controlling an informal security group of many ex-combatants from a post-war rebel network prior to the elections. As in previous chapters, narratives of individuals in post-war rebel networks – in this case Michael and Alex – will be used to further illustrate the dynamics keeping these networks active.

The final case study of this thesis, presented in **chapter six**, will focus on what I herein refer to as the complexity of the 'ex-combatant identity'. In this thesis we have followed ex-combatants who have survived peace by clinging to their wartime links and post-war rebel networks, and thereby also their ex-combatant identity. The chapter looks at the lives of ex-combatants within post-war rebel networks when there are no important political events to be mobilised for or no important security assignments or when ordinary Liberians cannot afford to keep them mobilised as vigilantes for community protection. The choice of focus for this chapter is partly based on an interest in what happens to the ex-combatant identity during such circumstances and accordingly to the relevance of post-war rebel networks during such times. I will here explore what it means for an individual ex-combatant, on the one hand, to be in need of an ex-combatant identity for work and societal security and, on the other, not being able to escape it, and people's perception of what such an identity implies.

Being recognised as an ex-combatant is far from unproblematic. Former rebels tend to be portrayed in research reports, media accounts, and by actors in post-conflict societies at large as indiscriminately violent and dangerous. Ex-combatants have more often than not been perceived as the real threats to lasting peace. Against this backdrop, this chapter explores what it thereby means in practice to be identified, and to identify oneself, with this category, given such negative perceptions. We will explore what it means for individual ex-combatants, like Abraham, Jacob, Alex and Michael to be in need of one's ex-combatant identity for work and social security, on the one hand, and to be unable to escape it and people's perception of what such an identity implies, on the other. We will follow these individuals to discover what

a life with an ex-combatant identity and a post-war rebel network implies when, in contrast to the situations in previous chapters, there are no important political events to be mobilised for, when community members cannot pay them to work as vigilantes or when there are no major security assignments to be carried out for elite actors. Does the identity as an ex-combatant then partly fade? Or will this identity and post-war rebel networks become even more relevant under such circumstances? Such questions asked in this chapter aim at coming closer to an understanding of what former rebels, and post-war rebel networks, are, and do, today in contemporary Liberia.

Furthermore, in this chapter another important question is posed: where are the women? Considering that many women actually served as combatants in the Liberian civil war it is striking how women have remained absent or invisible in post-war rebel networks examined for this thesis. Based on theories of gender and war, the chapter analyses whether an ex-combatant identity as such, due to the negative perceptions associated with it, may have different consequences for women than for men. In other words, the analyses explore whether women in general, unlike many men with a combatant background, have more to lose than to gain by being identified as an ex-combatant or by actively using this identity, or networks attach to it.

In a concluding chapter, **chapter seven**, key findings of the dissertation will be summarised and discussed further. The concluding chapter is divided into three separate themes, each presenting an overarching complex of problems examined in this thesis.

As a first theme I discuss what I call ‘the reintegration paradox’. I will argue that demobilisation of former rebel groups is much more than a technical procedure and much more complicated than is often assumed. As this thesis has shown, rebel networks in practice can easily remain mobilised long after their initial rebel group has been dissolved, while individual members of these post-war rebel networks may in fact be much more reintegrated into civil society than is often understood. Secondly, this theme will also provide a discussion of what I refer to as

‘the demobilisation dilemma’ that arises from this paradox. Findings from the thesis will be summarised in relation to a wider discussion of why failures or successes to demobilise ex-combatants have had less to do with whether the actual execution of DDR have been good or bad. Instead it is argued that the fundamental question is rather concerned with whether there exists a will, or even a need, for post-war rebel networks to *remain* active and mobilised, even when there are no wars to be fought.

In relation to the second theme, called ‘post-war rebel networks in Liberia and beyond’, I take a point of departure in Liberian post-war rebel networks but discuss them in a broader perspective, looking at similar networks in a wider African context. Within this theme I also argue that post-war rebel networks have not been acknowledged to the extent that they probably should. I suggest that this is due to fact that such networks are seldom examined unless they are involved in renewed warfare. With the case studies of this dissertation reaching beyond ex-combatants as recycled regional warriors, I explain why its findings should contribute to a more nuanced and complex understanding of post-war rebel networks in Liberia and beyond. This theme will also provide a summarising discussion on key questions relating to the existence of post-war rebel networks. Are they simply the real, and most acute, threat to peace they often are described to be, or are the perils of lingering rebel structures a much more complex issue?

Through the third and final theme of the concluding chapter, called from ‘perpetrators to protectors?’ we will engage in a deeper discussion of the abilities to transform ex-combatants and networks of ex-combatants have proved to possess. Here I will summarise the discussion of why the move from warrior to security provider is one that the ex-combatants may find natural to make in a post-conflict country like Liberia, where instability and insecurity is still an everyday reality for many citizens. In this context, the importance of the “ex-combatant identity” re-emerges. In a concluding and summarising discussion we will further examine what this identity means for former rebels in post-war rebel networks. We will return to the discussion on whether one can escape such an identity, and whether an escape is even desirable. This will lead us to the question of how it can be possible that a life with an ex-

combatant identity can be compatible with that of being a post-war informal security provider. Or in other words how, and to what extent, the perception of an ex-combatant can be transformed from being that of a perpetrator to that of a protector.

2. Liberia – the exercise of power and provision of security in the informal arena

This chapter aims to provide insight into the importance of the informal realm, beyond formal state institutions, for an understanding of how power is exercised and how security is provided for in Liberia. A range of both informal and formal security providers that ordinary citizens rely on can be discovered by acknowledging informal systems of power, institutions, and actors operating within these structures. In so doing, I suggest that the concept and mechanisms of vigilantism (in the form of local informal security provision) must be taken into account. Theories of vigilantism will be given considerable stress here due to the fact that the activities the post-war rebel networks examined for this dissertation are engaged in, as we shall see, often follows the same logic as vigilante practice. Understanding vigilantism – how such practice is possible and why it is often called upon – is therefore believed to be an important part of understanding how post-war rebel networks function in the informal security arena as well as its connections to the formal power structures. The approach adopted in this thesis is that the informal and formal security structures of Liberia must not be understood as each other's antithesis but rather as an intertwined, interacting web of official and unofficial links, shaping Liberia's contemporary security context. Within this context, different forms of vigilantism, often carried out by ex-combatants from post-war rebel networks, can be an important aspect of everyday security provision.

The insecurity and violence that has perpetuated itself in post-conflict Liberia, despite processes to reform the formal security institutions, will be discussed in the attempt to find explanations on a structural level for why informal security providers are important. This analysis provides a first insight into how political and other influential actors, by using their positions within the formal power structures, can use individuals and networks operating in the informal arena.

After a brief description of the Liberian civil war and of the rebel soldiers' path from belligerents to ex-combatants, post-war rebel networks, and informal security groups emerging from such platforms, will be looked into. This analysis will suggest explanations for and insights into why and how these wartime structures can be used in new informal security settings, attempting to find answers on both the structural and the individual level.

Understanding security provision in West Africa – Reviewing the literature

When analysing security and insecurity in Liberia it is crucial to also understand how power is exercised within this arena and, consequently, what actors hold authority over security provision. From a state-centred perspective, formal security institutions would be the natural focus for such analysis. In Liberia, however, as in many other African countries and elsewhere, such an approach would leave us with a very insufficient picture of the complex power structures controlling and influencing contemporary security policy. In the following section, the main focus will be instead on actors and institutions in the informal arena. Nevertheless, it is noted that these actors and institutions are still closely linked to formal structures and institutions as well as to official power and decision-making affecting security provision in Liberia.

As a starting point for examining these aspects of contemporary Liberia I will turn to the literature on African politics beyond a state-centred perspective, acknowledging that understanding politics in Africa is to understand how Africans experience and live politics in their daily lives, rather than formal politics.³⁷ I will explore literature that emphasises the importance of understanding public authority, power, and decision-making outside the frame of formal state institutions. When examining security and security provision, the same kind of approach will be adopted, taking a point of departure in the literature exploring institutions and actors who have resorted unofficially to 'policing' functions. Research with particular focus on Africa and states facing high levels of post-conflict violence will be central, alongside

³⁷ Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, "Africa Works – Disorder as Political Instrument", *African Issues*, The International African Institute in association with James Currey and Indiana University Press, 1999, p. xvii

theories of vigilantism. Furthermore, while discussing the reform of Liberia's formal security institutions I will explore literature on the informal power held by so-called 'Big Men', both within or with links to these institutions, and the relevance of their networks. This will finally lead me into examining the situation of ex-combatants, their potential role in post-war rebel networks, and informal security groups linked to key political or other influential actors or institutions within the official state system.

The limitations of state-centric approaches

The limitations of a state-centric approach when it comes to the understanding of how power is exercised in Africa have gradually received increased attention in recent years. Kevin Dunn, in his analysis of how the concept of the state in Africa has been treated in international relations theory, is one scholar who has recently called attention to this phenomenon. As Dunn argues, the reason the state is central to political systems elsewhere is because of its hegemonic position in society. But in Africa, the state has never achieved hegemonic domination over society. A state-centric focus is thereby bound to miss important elements and actors significant to African politics.³⁸ Non-state actors such as international financial institutions, regional strongmen (Big Men), international business actors and non-state military corporations for example are important players on the African scene which a strict state-centric perspective easily would disregard, Dunn notes. However, Dunn stresses that he is not arguing for the irrelevance of the state; he notes instead that the state remains an important force in both African domestic politics and international relations but that state-centric approaches have serious limitations for effectively understanding events in Africa.³⁹ What is occurring in Africa, Dunn concludes, is not the absence of politics, as has often been argued, but the practice of politics in complex and original ways. Models based on Western arrogance need to be rejected so that alternative forms of socio-political organisations can be examined.⁴⁰ If one looks at politics and international politics in Africa with a state-centric focus, as for instance Christopher Clapham does in his research on state survival in Africa, one

³⁸ Kevin C. Dunn, "MadLib # 32: The (Blank) African State: Rethinking the Sovereign State in International Relations Theory", in Ed. Kevin C. Dunn and Timothy M. Shaw, *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 50-51.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

should remember, as Clapham has pointed out, that the less solid the state, the greater is the need to look beyond it for an understanding of how the society it claims to govern fits into the international system.⁴¹ Along the same line of thinking Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, as early as the late 1990s, demonstrated the importance of acknowledging the realm of the informal when trying to understand African politics. Their analysis was based on the claim that the ‘real’ business of politics in Africa is often taking place elsewhere than observers have placed their focus of analysis. Additionally, within the political context in Africa, what is actually happening is more often than not informal or personalised in nature.⁴² In order to answer the research questions posed in this thesis I will start from this perspective, by emphasising the importance of the informal power bases within African politics. Yet it is not only the informal context, beyond the state structures, that is of importance for understanding how politics is carried out and how power is exercised on the African continent. I agree with Dunn when he argues that the state remains an important force in an African context, and I therefore suggest that the dynamic *between* the formal state and the informal realms needs to be emphasised in such an analysis. Understanding the rationale behind the often hidden links tying the official representatives of power to informal actors or networks will be even more important when examining my research questions.

As Chabal and Daloz point out, elites are usually linked to the rest of the population through the business of politics along informal vertical channels of patron-client networks and other structures. There is no institutionalised civil society in Africa separated from the governmental structures, since this is only possible where a strong and strongly differentiated state exists. Accordingly, Chabal and Daloz suggest that the understanding of politics in Africa is rather a matter of identifying the complexities of what they call the ‘shadow boxing’ that takes place between state and society the way that political actors, both within the formal and informal spheres, link up to sustain the networks that are the basis for politics in Africa.⁴³ As stated by Christian Lund, in his article on what he calls “Twilight Institutions” in Africa, there is no shortage of institutions attempting to exercise public authority. However, as Lund points out,

⁴¹ Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System – The Politics of State Survival*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 6.

⁴² Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p. 1.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 21-22.

public authority does not always fall within the exclusive realm of government institutions. Traditional institutions claiming public authority, such as chieftaincy, often with government recognition, exist alongside government institutions. Associations and organisations, which at first sight do not appear to be political, may also exercise political power and public authority. Public authority thereby becomes the consolidated result of the exercise of power by a range of institutions. These institutions often operate in the twilight between state and society, between public and private.⁴⁴

In the subsequent case studies of this thesis, while exploring the significance of post-war rebel networks, I will adopt the perspectives presented above. The networks I aim to examine are not official in character, as the warring parties signed the comprehensive peace agreement years ago. Consequently, their potential links to the political and economic elite cannot be official either. I am therefore not interested in formal governance in Liberia as such and will accordingly not rely on the literature analysing formal African state structures, politics, or governance. My focus here is instead the informal governance of Liberia allowing political power and public authority, to exist outside the official state structures.

Security provision beyond formal governance

When it comes to the exercise of power in the field of security in an African context, my approach for this thesis is that public authority must also be understood from the perspective of informal governance. As shown in the work of William Reno, on warlord politics and African states, the distinction between collective and private authority can occasionally be blurred. Inhabitants of a collapsed (bureaucratic) state may, for example, enjoy security due to the presence of an armed organisation operating in an area in order to attain mineral resources. But the critical difference, Reno argues, between this type of organisation and a conventional state, even if it is weak, lies in the circumstance that the inhabitants do not enjoy security by right of their membership in a state. Security in this case is instead reliant upon the venture's

⁴⁴ Christian Lund, "Twilight Institutions: Public Authority and Local Politics in Africa", *Development and Change*, 37(4):685-705, 2006, p. 686.

profitability and to what degree the security provision satisfies the interests of the provider. Local security may therefore cease unless inhabitants take it upon themselves to shoulder the responsibility for providing it themselves.⁴⁵ The provision of security thereby, as illustrated by Reno's example, becomes something much more complex than if it was merely a collective good provided for by the state and its formal institutions. It should be noted, furthermore, as Adedeji Ebo has stated in his analysis of security governance in West Africa, that given the alienated nature and structure of the state in this region, other actors have naturally emerged to contest and engage the state in the governance of security. The typical West African state, he finds, has hardly been a success in the Weberian sense and has often itself been a major source of insecurity for its citizens. Its monopoly of the means of force has been artificial and limited. A viable understanding of security governance in West Africa must necessarily extend beyond both statutory security institutions and the increasingly visible private security contractors. Ebo argues that researchers and policy makers have placed disproportionate emphasis on commercial security actors, which has tended to divert research interest and policy focus away from other non-state actors who play significant roles in security governance in West Africa.⁴⁶ Along the same lines of thinking Bruce Baker has presented arguments concerning the issue of security provision in Africa. He states that a focus on government agencies often directs attention away from the multiple choices of protection from crime and abuse that Africans rely on in their daily lives. Instead there are advantages in focusing on the consumers of governance through a 'multi-choice' approach, which examines a whole range of security providers that citizens face for their different security requirements.⁴⁷ In contemporary Africa a whole array of formal and informal groups exercise policing functions either as an ancillary or as their primary role. Among the informal or autonomous citizen groups exercising policing functions, anti-crime groups, religious police, ethnic militias or vigilantes are common. With different means of coercion, these groups can and do perform tasks assigned to the public police force. Law enforcement thereby becomes a broader activity than simply what 'The Police' do, Baker states.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Adedeji Ebo, "Non-State Actors, Peacebuilding and Security Governance in West Africa: Beyond Commercialisation", *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2007, p. 54.

⁴⁷ Bruce Baker, *Multi-Choice Policing in Africa*, The Nordic Africa Institute, 2008, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The arguments on security provision presented above are central for the approach in this thesis. Liberian citizens' need for security provision goes beyond what formal security institutions are able, or willing, to provide. As Ebo has pointed out, the starting point for understanding security in West Africa is the recognition that the state at no point in time has had a monopoly of legitimate force. Just as West African states have operated dichotomised regimes of formal and informal economies, the security sector has also manifested both formal and informal tracks, Ebo concludes. In fact, statutory security institutions have primarily been focused on security functions to secure the state and its institutions themselves, while the main parts of the populations have relied instead on parallel, less formalised security structures.⁴⁹ For that reason we need to further engage in how informal security provision functions and the reasons for its importance. In the following section I will therefore start by examining the violence ordinary citizens often face in post-war environments, seeking to understand the challenges thus implied, and the creativity people resort to in order to meet these challenges and to safeguard their everyday protection.

Living with everyday violence – seeking protection among formal and informal security actors

Violence, or the threat of violence, shapes the everyday lives of many African citizens. And when it comes to post-conflict contexts, security needs are often massive. As Mats Berdal points out in his research on post-war violence, societies transitioning from war to peace often harbour high and persistent levels of violence following the formal end of conflict. The links between post-war violence, on the one hand, and state-weakness or fragility, on the other, has been a central theme in the literature, and Berdal concludes that the general argument in this field can be summarised easily: post-war violence is critically linked to the absence of state institutions that can control and regulate the use of force and provide its citizens with basic security. Accordingly, until state capacity and public authority is re-constituted, violence will remain. However, as Berdal points out, of particular interest here are which mechanisms and circumstances may permit state-weakness to transform into post-war violence. For instance, when individuals and communities are faced with a situation where the state has lost its

⁴⁹ Ebo, 2007, p. 56.

coercive capacity and violence escalates, populations will try to reduce uncertainty and insecurity by turning to actors or alternatives that offer the best chance for survival.⁵⁰ Hill, Temin and Pacholek have similarly noted that in most cases individuals and communities in contexts where formal and public security is inefficient or scarce create their own security mechanisms or accept compromised and unaccountable security, provided by non-state actors. Furthermore, individuals and communities forced to take security into their own hands are often also remarkably effective and creative in doing so.⁵¹

The measures people resort to and the creativity citizens in states with weak security institutions show when levels of violence are high in order to protect themselves are very relevant for my research and will be further addressed in the following case studies. How people cope with violence and insecurity is central for this understanding and can be illustrated by the findings of Carolyn Nordstrom who has followed the creativity ordinary people showed in order to survive the war in Mozambique. What she found, even in the epicentres of war and violence, was that people did not resort to an unstructured 'dog-eat-dog' survival mentality in the absence of formal governmental and social institutions. Most people were, quite the opposite, actively dedicated to rebuilding their lives and societies. They were also actively engaged in work with others in finding solutions to the war and instituting conflict resolution measures at the local level.⁵² There are no reasons to believe that people in a post-conflict setting such as Liberia would not resort to the same levels of creativity found by Nordstrom in the Mozambique warzones in order to cope with the everyday violence and lack of security in the absence of state-offered protection. This, I would argue, contributes to the explanation for the use of informal security networks. As Baker has suggested, when a state cannot offer a system that protects people from crime and when it cannot guarantee to detect and punish occurring crimes, people are likely to resort to their own policing and courts.⁵³

⁵⁰ Mats Berdal, "Reflections on post-war violence and peacebuilding", in Ed. Astri Suhrke and Mats Berdal, *The Peace In Between – Post-war violence and peacebuilding*, Routledge, 2012, pp. 314-315.

⁵¹ Richard Hill, Jonathan Temin and Lisa Pacholek, "Building Security Where There is No Security", in *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2007, p. 38.

⁵² Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. 12-13.

⁵³ Baker, 2008, p. 45.

Furthermore, Chabal and Daloz identify two essential forms of violence in Africa: crime and 'state' violence. To cope with this violence survival strategies and counter-measures are required that often demand the protection of organised networks. In such a context, where citizens need to find protection that compensates for a state's failure to provide security but at the same time need to find protection against the very violence performed by the state itself, the management of violence can turn into a resource for some. It thereby becomes of crucial to examine networks that seek to organise and make the high levels of violence found in Africa productive, Chabal and Daloz suggest.⁵⁴ In fact, most of the security and justice in post-conflict and fragile states is actually carried out by non-state security and justice actors, not by the state police and judiciary. Nonetheless, in many fragile states it is impossible to make a sharp distinction between state and non-state justice and security systems. The delivery of security should rather be described to exist in a continuum between these nodes.⁵⁵ Few African citizens see formal and informal security provision as mutually exclusive categories and rarely use either one or the other exclusively. People constantly move from one sphere of security agency to another, formal or informal, in order to safeguard their protection at the very moment.⁵⁶

Despite the informal security arena's importance for many African citizens, the dynamics of this context, its links to the formal security institutions and the mechanisms, rationale and structures of the actors operating in this sphere appear to be largely unknown to the outside world. In order to also understand the significance of the informal security context in Liberia it is vital to understand the dynamics of contemporary post-war violence and the ability (or inability) of formal security institutions to handle this violence/challenge. But the ability, or inability, of the state to safeguard security provision for its citizens cannot be analysed in a vacuum. As Berdal states, there has been a tendency in the state-building literature to extensively focus on the issue of states' "low capacity". Even though state capacity is critical,

⁵⁴ Chabal and Daloz, 1999, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁵ Bruce Baker and Eric Scheye, "Multi-layered justice and security delivery in post-conflict and fragile states", in *Conflict, Security & Development*, 7:4 December, 2007, p. 512-513.

⁵⁶ Baker, 2008, p. 27.

he argues, the reconstitution of that capacity and the form the state takes have more relevance for the prospect of post-war violence.⁵⁷ For example, as will be discussed later in more detail, the Liberian state and its formal security institutions after the war were not essentially in need of *regaining* the capacity to protect its citizens since the protection of ordinary Liberians had never been a priority of the Liberian state in the first place. In fact, Liberians have a history of being occupied with protecting themselves against different security threats, including those posed by the state. It is thereby important to not focus only on whether the Liberian state has had, and has, the capacity to protect its citizens; one must also consider whether this ever has been, or is, in the interest of the Liberian state at all.

Post-war security and insecurity in Liberia

“When a war ends, it makes less difference than we might think. No alchemy exists whereby state and society ‘naturally’ revert to prewar realities with the declaration of peace”.⁵⁸

Since the war came to an end in 2003 major efforts have been undertaken to strengthen and reform the formal security institutions such as the army and the police in Liberia. As the peace agreement was signed, a force of approximately 15,000 peacekeepers under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations was deployed to assist the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) in implementing the agreement, creating one of the largest UN peacekeeping missions in the world at that point. The UN force was mandated, among other tasks, to advise, train and assist the Liberian law enforcement authorities and other criminal justice institutions and assist the NTGL in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process of the ex-combatants. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) took the leading role in the reform of the Liberian National Police (LNP) and began the recruitment of cadets for the new police force in mid-2004. By late November 2004, a first batch of the newly trained officers were deployed to the counties.⁵⁹ The United States,

⁵⁷ Berdal, 2012, p. 317.

⁵⁸ Nordstrom, 2004, p. 144.

⁵⁹ United Nations Mission in Liberia, UNMIL History, available at: <http://unmil.org/1content.asp?ccat=history&zdoc=1>

with a long history of interests in Liberia, focused on the reform of the Liberian Armed Forces (AFL) through private contractors. However, the Security Sector Reform (SSR) represented an enormous challenge for Liberia coming out of fourteen years of war. The process entailed addressing a security sector that has historically been dysfunctional, politicised and incapable of protecting ordinary Liberian citizens.

According to some observers, the army reform, despite many current challenges, has been a provisional success with its pool of 2,000 vetted and trained soldiers.⁶⁰ However, most observers agree that the police reform has been less than successful, leaving Liberia with an ineffective, badly trained, under-resourced and corrupt police force. LNP has both funding and logistical problems and is fundamentally insufficient for the security needs of Liberia. Furthermore, the LNP is unarmed. As this was a political call, based on the police force's past misuse of power, this decision is not necessarily incorrect, but it leaves the completely unarmed LNP at risk of being unable to stop armed criminals or even protect themselves. As a result, there are areas that the police are unable or unwilling to patrol. In addition, a police officer earns little more than seventy US dollars per month, leaving officers with few chances to support themselves on this low wage. Corruption thereby becomes a tool for survival for LNP officers.⁶¹

In her analysis of the security sector reform in Liberia, Podder found that the limitations of this process was a result of the gap between international approaches and Liberian local realities of security and justice provision through a mix of formal and informal actors. The attempts to reconstruct a state monopoly on security provision has not sufficiently taken into account that both formal and informal structures and actors operate within Liberian security and justice provision. Podder claims that as both formal and informal actors are able to provide legitimate public and private security in areas of low state presence, security sector

⁶⁰ International Crisis Group, "Liberia: Uneven Progress in the Security Sector Reform", *Africa Report*, No. 148, January, 2009.

⁶¹ Ana Kantor and Mariam Persson, "Liberian Vigilantes: Informal Security Provision on the Margins of Security Sector Reform" in Ed. Magnus Ekengren and Greg Simons, *The Politics of Security Sector Reform: Challenges and Opportunities for the European Union's Global Role*, Ashgate, 2011, p. 285.

initiatives should seize the opportunity to include legitimate informal actors into the institutional rebuilding process that accompanies SSR. Reliance on such actors stems from the trust and efficiency of these frameworks. To exclude legitimate actors simply due to their informal character risks creating low-capacity institutions and conditions for public dissatisfaction that may fuel further conflict, Podder notes. In the efforts to establish a weak state's monopoly over violence, key networks and actors that sustain security provision at the local level are overlooked. In the Liberian case the use of such an approach has failed to acknowledge local perceptions of insecurity which creates pockets of exclusion and resistance. International efforts to reform the security sector through its focus on formal institutions of security, she argues, remain disengaged with the public perception of who is best placed to offer them security.⁶²

Accordingly, formal initiatives to strengthen and reform the Liberian post-war security landscape have failed to acknowledge the importance of informal security providing actors and mechanisms. In this thesis I will not scrutinise these formal security sector reform processes further. Challenges and inadequacies in its planning and implementation have been analysed in detail elsewhere.⁶³ In the sections to come, however, I will give further attention to the informal actors and initiatives of security provision often neglected by formal processes. A broader understanding of the various actors, and perhaps especially the informal ones, can nuance our understanding of post-conflict security landscapes.

The role of Big Men and Women – linking formal actors to informal networks

In this post-war context of weak formal security institutions, which were not only destroyed by the civil war but also had a pre-war history of being inefficient and predatory, the informal security arena is inevitably of great importance for the Liberian people. Furthermore, as Mats

⁶² Sukanya Podder, "Bridging the 'Conceptual-Contextual' Divide: Security Sector Reform in Liberia and UNMIL Transition", in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 7:3, 353-380, 2013.

⁶³ See for example; Adedeji Ebo, "Challenges and Opportunities of Security Sector Reform in Post-Conflict Liberia", Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Occasional Paper No. 9, 2005, and Morten Bøås and Karianne Stig, "Security Sector Reform in Liberia: An Uneven Partnership without Local Ownership", in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 4:3.285-303, 2010.

Utas has described in his research on informal power and networks of Liberia, a shift from formal to informal power is nonetheless rather difficult to bring about in Liberia, even though the serious destruction of state structures and bureaucracy caused by the civil wars ought to have made room for rapid social capacity improvements of the state. Accordingly, although the state as a structure was destroyed, the informal powers and the logic that actually ruled Liberia remained very much the same during the years of war. As Utas further shows, the lack of a well-functioning state has made it crucial for Liberians to have good connections with 'Big Men' in a variety of networks. These Big Men are businessmen, military commanders, politicians, civil servants or outright illegal actors. They use their positions of status for individual extractions of state or natural resources and to recruit followers or dependants. This relationship offers mutual benefits for the Big Men and their followers, as Big Men need followers to attain resources, while part of what is extracted is being channelled from them to their followers.⁶⁴ As Clapham has pointed out, clientelism (which this is an example of) must be understood as a rational behaviour following from a logic of personal relations, not as a characteristic of particular cultures.⁶⁵ It is complex and multifunctional but also competitive in nature, as clients attach themselves to patrons in order to gain advantages in a contest over scarce resources. Furthermore, even though the clientelist relationship itself is dyadic, that is between the patron and the client, the dynamic that creates it must be understood in relation to a wider social construct, Clapham argues. Here one must acknowledge the 'clientelist system' where the clientelist links are fairly widespread.⁶⁶ Such a perspective on power relations is applicable to contemporary Liberia. In the Liberian case, the Big Men Utas refers to operate both within formal and informal contexts, and often also in both the legal and illegal sphere. As politicians, even at the very highest level, these formal actors can only fully be understood if their roles in informal networks also are taken into account. Utas argues that, due to the centralised nature of power in Liberia, all the current Big Men, no matter what positions they might hold, have connections and are partially loyal to the Biggest Man, or Woman, of Liberia. In other words, the position currently held by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and by Charles Taylor before her. Furthermore, when it comes to President Johnson

⁶⁴ Mats Utas, "Liberia Beyond the Blueprints: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Big Men and Informal Networks", The Nordic Africa Institute, The Swedish Defence Research Agency, *Lecture Series on African Security*, 2008:4, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Christopher Clapham, *Private Patronage and Public Power – Political Clientelism in the Modern State*, Frances Pinter Publishers, 1982, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

Sirleaf, she must be seen as a master at manoeuvring both the informal and informal context. On the one hand, she has a Harvard degree and a former career within the UN system and the World Bank as well as long experience in Liberian politics. On the other hand, she has held important positions in several pre-war governments and more importantly been an active player in the Liberian civil wars.⁶⁷ In June 2009, the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) found Johnson Sirleaf to have sponsored the rebel group National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and Charles Taylor in order to overthrow the government of Samuel Doe.⁶⁸ This background has furnished President Johnson Sirleaf with the ability to manoeuvre the international arena as well as Liberia's formal and informal spheres of power. As shall be further discussed, President Johnson Sirleaf is one of the influential actors within the Liberian elite that have had both incentive and capacity to use the informal security groups, based on lingering wartime structures, for various purposes.

In the same way as Liberian power and politics must be analysed, bearing both formal and informal structures in mind, so must the aspects of Liberian security and insecurity be explored. Following the logic of how power is exercised in Liberia, influential actors, with the ability of providing security, or to cause insecurity, are (and must be) based within, or have links to, both the formal and informal arenas. This means that actors within the formal state structures, whether they are politicians or important actors within the formal security institutions such as the army or police in Liberia, must interact, in one way or another, with informal actors able to provide or create security, or to cause insecurity. This, I suggest, creates an environment where post-war rebel networks and the actors within these structures inevitably become relevant and are both allowed and called upon to linger.

Vigilantism – security provision on the margins of the state?

As we have seen, protection of ordinary Liberians has never been a priority of the Liberian state from a historical perspective, and Liberians have been left to protect themselves, in fact

⁶⁷ Utas, 2008, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Consolidated Final Report, June 30, 2009, available at: https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final/volume-two_layout-1.pdf

against different security threats, including those posed by the state. As noted by Ebo for example, Liberia's asymmetrical social relations have created a cleavage between the state and the vast majority of Liberians. Like Ebo points out, the seeds of what grew to become the Liberian security sector were sown by the elite to create a security structure to preserve and protect the interests of the privileged. In other words, the main reason for the Liberian security sector to exist in the first place has been the security of the state, often at the expense of "the state of security" – that is, the extent to which society feels safe, encompassing a broad human security agenda and not merely military, national, regime or even individual security.⁶⁹ To understand the Liberian post-conflict landscape, a focus beyond the formal security institutions and practices is therefore required. The practice of vigilantism, an activity that often operates on the border between informal and formal security provision, is thereby identified as an important aspect to analyse in the Liberian context.

Vigilantism can be understood as a form of informal security provision that people choose or are forced to rely on for their basic human security. Yet in contemporary media and elsewhere vigilantism tends to be described as characterised by undisciplined mobs or crowds of young men without any clearly defined social or political identity, acting spontaneously on emotional impulses.⁷⁰ As Buur and Jensen have pointed out, however, viewing vigilantism from such a narrow perspective is not helpful when trying to understand such a complex phenomenon. Although vigilante organisations challenge rule of law and the state's monopoly of violence, this practice cannot be reduced to either expressions of the mob or to mere antidotes to formal law, they argue. The complexity and the ambivalence lies in the fact that vigilantism addresses issues of security and moral order that are relevant for people living on the margins of the reach of the formal state apparatus, and thereby also often becomes legitimate at local levels of the state. As such, vigilantism can arguably in many cases be seen as a form of local, everyday policing.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ebo, 2005.

⁷⁰ Lars Buur and Steffen Jensen, "Vigilantism and the Policing of Everyday Life in South Africa", *Africa* 78 (1), 2004, pp. 139-140

⁷¹ Ibid.

Vigilantism can emerge and further be encouraged as a result of deep mistrust of the state and formal security providers. Daniel Nina, for example, has argued that vigilantism arises from the perception that the state is doing nothing to guarantee the safety of a community. The state in this light is thereby seen as limited player with regard to crime prevention. Accordingly, the notion of the state as the sole guarantor of safety and security becomes little more than a myth.⁷² Still, as been pointed out by Pratten and Sen, vigilantism must be understood at the same time as something more than a popular response to the vacuum left by state collapse, failure or instrumentalised disorder, despite the fact that police resourcing and corruption contribute materially to the emergence and continuing legitimacy of vigilantes.⁷³ Informal security provision should not, as indicated above, be understood as something entirely separated from the formal security sphere. These organised attempts to defeat crime or enforce norms and law and order, sometimes with violent measures, are often claimed to be outside of, and in opposition to, an inefficient and even predatory state. Yet, Buur and Jensen argue, the links between these informal groups and the state are often more complex. These groups operate at the frontier of the state, blurring the boundaries of what normally falls within and outside the formal sphere. Formal security providers sometimes take part in informal security provision, like police officers in vigilante groups, while state representatives, on the other hand, have used vigilante groups for legally sanctioned violence.⁷⁴ Pratten, in the case of Nigeria, gives further examples of the blurring boundaries between vigilantism and state activities. Here, the state itself and individual state governors have provided a significant impetus for vigilante practices. This can be illustrated by the actions of the state governors, who argued that the federal police were unable to deal with local conflicts and therefore sponsored vigilante groups as a substitute for autonomous state-level police forces.⁷⁵ Suzette Heald, in her research on vigilantism in Tanzania, shows how strongly the state and vigilante groups can be connected. In this case, villagers in central Tanzania from the early 1980s and onwards began to organise their own form of collective policing, which came to be known as *sungusungu*. Heald shows that these groups, which initially by-passed the official state structures, far from being rejected have instead become

⁷² Daniel Nina, "Dirty Harry is back: Vigilantism in South Africa – The (re)emergence of 'good' and 'bad' community", *African Security Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2000.

⁷³ David Pratten and Atreyee Sen, *Global Vigilantes*, HURST Publishers Ltd, 2007, p. 6.

⁷⁴ Buur and Jensen, 2004, pp. 144-145.

⁷⁵ David Pratten, "The Politics of Protection: Perspectives on Vigilantism in Nigeria", *Africa* 78 (1), 2008, p. 5.

an integral part of the administrative structures of rural Tanzania. In northern Tanzania *sungusungu* organisations emerged from the start with strong state support, the administration mandating local communities to codify their own laws and impose their own punishments. This, Heald argues, raises questions about the nature of the post-colonial state in Africa. It is easy to regard the emergence of such unofficial police forces as ‘vigilantes’ and as yet another threat to human rights. However, it is important to contextualise these movements in the circumstances from which they arise, Heald states. These specific informal security groups tend to evoke a positive public response. At the community level *sungusungu* groups have received little but praise, and at this level they are also believed to actually represent the righteousness of the ordinary citizen, as a response to criminals and a guard against the corruption in the form of a state officialdom. Even at the state level, the political and administrative wing of the government largely agrees and supports them accordingly.⁷⁶ But as Pratten and Sen question: is it ‘private’ or ‘public’ policing when a government legislates to authorise local defence forces or to sponsor vigilante groups? And when communities grasp opportunities within the law to organise their own protection, without being explicitly authorised to do so, is it then ‘private policing’?⁷⁷ Such questions, I would argue, unavoidably shed light on the complexity of the blurred boundaries and existing links between private and public, state and non-state and formal and informal security provision relevant for the research in this dissertation.

Furthermore, as Kirsh and Grätz underline in their analysis of vigilantism in Africa, the question of who is entitled to enact justice, to police morality and to sanction wrongdoings has increasingly been subjected to violent conflict in many African countries.⁷⁸ These questions thereby open up for the analysis of conflicts and contestation between such presumed dichotomies over the authority of security provision and over what parts of these practices are to be considered legitimate or illegitimate. This could be summarised in the words of Ray Abrahams: “The analyst of vigilantes is by definition operating in the shadows rather than the bright light of consensus and legitimate authority, and the boundary between vigilante and

⁷⁶ Suzette Heald, “State, Law, and Vigilantism in Northern Tanzania”, *African Affairs*, 105/419, 256-283, 2005, pp. 265-256.

⁷⁷ Pratten and Sen, 2007, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Thomas G. Kirsch and Tilo Grätz (Eds.) *Domesticating Vigilantism in Africa*, James Currey, 2010, p. 1.

criminal, like that between heroes and bandits or patriots and traitors, is both fluid and manipulable.”⁷⁹ Similarly Chabal and Daloz have suggested that when examining the range of activities informal security providing networks carry out they should rather be analysed from the perspective of ‘legitimacy’ and ‘accountability’ than perceptions of ‘legal or illegal’. In a context of patron-client relations the notions of legal and illegal can become irrelevant as accountability takes the form of redistribution. Where patrons manage to provide their clients with the expected resources, it will largely be considered as legitimate, even if it is illicit. It is only when patrons fail to redistribute resources, Chabal and Daloz argue, that their activities will be regarded as criminal.⁸⁰ Based on the arguments presented above, I proceed with the acknowledgement that vigilante groups, or informal security groups in general, may be seen as illegal from one perspective while at the same time be considered as both accountable and legitimate by both ordinary citizens, and unofficially, even by the very state.

The links between informal security providers and the formal sphere are, for different reasons, often kept hidden. As Lund points out in the case of Niger, vigilante groups along with various informal actors portrayed the state as their antithesis, as the state was considered distinctly removed from the local arena. These groups had an ambiguous position as they searched for credibility. On the one hand, they emphasized their non-state status and on the other, they operated in the formal language of the state. Vigilantes could, for example, sometimes involve themselves in police matters. In this sense these groups, by vying to establish their own public authority, paradoxically become part of the very state they depict as distinct, distant and exterior.⁸¹ But as Ray Abrahams reminds us, vigilantism cannot exist alone, but operates alongside, and typically on the frontiers – structural and or cultural – of state power. Vigilantism, furthermore, is typically more critical of the state’s actual performance rather than the state itself.⁸² In the following section these blurred boundaries between formal states

⁷⁹ Ray Abrahams, “Sungusungu: Village Vigilante Groups in Tanzania”, in *African Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 343, pp-179-196, 1987, p. 180.

⁸⁰ Chabal and Daloz, 1999, p. 79.

⁸¹ Lund, 2006, p. 688.

⁸² Ray Abrahams, “Some Thoughts on the Comparative Study of Vigilantism”, in Ed. Pratten and Sen, *Global Vigilantes*, HURST Publishers Ltd, 2007, p. 423.

and informal actors, here used for their violent potential, but also their ability to protect, will be further considered.

State-sanctioned use of informal security networks and rebel groups

African governments have used not only community-based vigilante groups to achieve political ends. In fact, other informal security providing networks, and even rebel groups, have unofficial links to formal states. An example of this is the Kamajors in Sierra Leone, which Hoffman describes as a web of social relations or patronage networks that became militarized during the war. This ethnically Mende-based network constituted the largest force of the country's 'Civil Defence Forces', which served as an umbrella term for disparate Sierra Leonean militias. When the Mende-dominated Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won the election in 1996, the Kamajors gained greater influence. Sam Hinga Norman became a key figure in the Kamajor movement but was also appointed the SLPP's Deputy Minister of Defence. The Kamajors thereby became widely perceived, particularly by the Sierra Leone Army, to be the SLPP government's *de facto* security force, Hoffman argues. Later on the Kamajors, along with other irregular forces under the banner of CDF, helped to reinstate the SLPP in 1998 during the war.⁸³ Another example of the unofficially state-sanctioned use of informal networks in Sierra Leone can be illustrated by the role of the West Side Boys (WSB) militia during the end of the civil war. Here the military commanders and politicians employed the WSB as a tactical instrument in a larger plot to safeguard their own military and political interests.⁸⁴ The WSB was one of several military actors in the Sierra Leone civil war, which became a useful tool for politicians and which was partly encouraged and managed in a way that benefited sections of the political elite.⁸⁵ As President Kabbah and his government in the year of 2000 grew increasingly afraid of the rebel movement Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the government of Sierra Leone made the WSB part of an 'ad-hoc security force' that was successfully used against the RUF, which was eventually forced to lay down its weapons.⁸⁶

⁸³ Danny Hoffman, "The meaning of a militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone", in *African Affairs*, 106/425, (639-662), 2007, pp. 642-643.

⁸⁴ Mats Utas and Magnus Jörgel, "The West Side Boys: Military navigation in the Sierra Leone civil war", in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46, 3, (487-511), 2008, p. 488.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 491.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 502-503.

This, I would argue, gives further evidence of how informal security networks, and even rebel structures, are strategically used and how formal and informal actors interact in order to gain mutual benefits and to reach political, military and economic goals, in times of both war and peace.

Informal security provision and vigilantism in Liberia

How, then, are we to understand informal security provision and vigilantism in Liberia? The analysis by Kirsch and Grätz of African vigilantism has shown us that there is amazing variation in how vigilante groups are structured and organised on the continent. Vigilantes have been influenced by and aligned with institutions as varied as secret societies, community-oriented agencies of policing, the military, traditional assemblies and courts, private security companies, NGOs, sports associations and hunters' associations. Kirsch and Grätz also note that there is considerable variety in how the different vigilante groups acquire their legitimacy and how they relate to state agencies and other political and legal authorities.⁸⁷ The wars in Liberia left the country in ruins, with a state security apparatus far from being capable of safeguarding basic security of its citizens. I would suggest that vigilantism, or informal security provision in general, in Liberia could be both an alternative and a response to a state with limited capacity, or even unwillingness, to provide security for its citizens. On the other hand, vigilantism or the mobilisation of other types of informal security-providing groups could also be a practice used by the state, the state security institutions and other actors within the state apparatus, in order to contribute to the overall security of ordinary Liberians. Seen from yet another perspective, vigilantism and informal security provision could even potentially be used by the very same actors and institutions to fulfil personal, political or economic interests. As Pratten and Sen note, contemporary vigilantism relates both to the fragmentation of the sovereignty of nation-states and to the dependence that states have on the vigilance of their citizens.⁸⁸ This mutual dependence, and the links between the state and informal security groups in the Liberian context, will further be examined later in this thesis.

⁸⁷ Kirsch and Tilo, 2010, p. 4.

⁸⁸ Pratten and Sen, 2007, p. 13.

From rebel soldiers to ex-combatants

No one knows exactly how many they were, the men and women who fought in the many rebel factions in the Liberian civil wars. Some moved from one rebel movement to another, some laid down their weapons when the first war came to a halt in 1996, only to take up arms again as violence resumed in 1999. Some even avoided the whole disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration process that followed the official end of the war in 2003. Others enlisted as combatants in the DDDR process even though they might not have had that status, due to the benefits offered. According to the official numbers given by the UN, by November 2004, when the disarmament and demobilisation phase ended, 103,019 persons had been disarmed.⁸⁹ No matter the exact numbers, the Liberian wars, which according to popular estimations may have taken between 60,000 and 200,000 lives, created a large category of Liberians referred to as *ex-combatants*. In order to specifically understand the ex-combatants who have remained active in post-war rebel networks, their lives and opportunities (and lack of such) after the peace agreement had been signed need to be analysed.

I will not go into detail on the Liberian civil wars here, except for a brief description, and I do not attempt to examine root causes and political developments during the course of wars either; that has been done elsewhere.⁹⁰ Instead, my focus here will be on *post-war* Liberia and the transition from rebel soldiers to ex-combatants active in post-war rebel networks which some of these Liberians went through.

A brief history of the Liberian wars

The first Liberian civil war began on Christmas Eve in 1989 when Charles Taylor and a group of about 150 rebel soldiers, known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), entered the

⁸⁹ National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), *DDDDR Consolidated Report Phase 1, 2 & 3*, 2005.

⁹⁰ For a more detailed discussion on the Liberian civil wars see for example; Adebajo, 2002, Ellis, 1999, Moran, 2006, Reno, 1999, Sawyer, 2005.

country as they crossed the borders to Nimba County from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. At this time, President Samuel Doe held power. At the age of twenty-eight, Master Sergeant Samuel Doe, of Krahn origin, had come to power on the night of April 12 in 1980 as he and a group of non-commissioned officers violently ousted the former regime in Liberia. The coup ended President William Tolbert's rule (1971-1980) and the over 100-year-old Americo-Liberian political, economic and military dominance.⁹¹ Doe, who has been described as Liberia's first warlord⁹², became increasingly devoted to consolidating power for himself and in doing so he had to marginalise other powerful actors. In his first five years in power, Doe has been said to have executed more than fifty rivals, real and imagined, after secret trials.⁹³ Furthermore, Doe, in the same manner as the Americo-Liberian elite before him, began to systematically promote individuals into key political and military positions from a few selected clans within his own ethnic group, immediately after seizing power.⁹⁴ The NPFL, who had gathered supporters and mobilised fighters within the Gio and Mano communities in particular due to Doe's violence and suppression against them, soon came to split into two factions. In 1990, Prince Johnson, a former commissioned officer of the AFL and commander of the Liberian military police who joined forces with Charles Taylor, broke away from the NPFL. With Prince Johnson followed several hundreds of Gio and Mano rebels to form the Independent National Front of Liberia (INPFL). The two factions, who at times fought each other, both came closer to Monrovia while defeating the AFL and reached the Liberian capital in July 1990. In September of the same year, Prince Johnson, seemingly with the help of the newly created West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG, managed to capture President Doe. While being videotaped the President was tortured and eventually killed.⁹⁵ Even though Prince Johnson had been the one who eventually ended Doe's time in power, Taylor had a stronger hold of Liberia. In 1992 Johnson went into exile in Nigeria and the INPFL collapsed. Many of his combatants then joined the NPFL. As the war spread several new rebel factions also emerged. The United Liberation

⁹¹ As Bøås points out, a social conflict began already when the first settlers, freed slaves from the United States, arrived in Liberia between 1822 and 1861. The group that came to be known as the Americo-Liberians declared Liberia a republic in 1847 and what Bøås describes as both a one-party- and apartheid state was created as the indigenous Liberians were strongly discriminated against. In this sense, as Bøås puts it, Liberia has been at 'war' with itself from the beginning of its existence as an independent state. See; Bøås, Morten, "The Liberian Civil War: New War/Old War?", in *Global Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1, January, 2005.

⁹² Reno, 1998.

⁹³ Bill Berkeley, "The Graves Are Not Yet Full – Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa", 2001, p. 32.

⁹⁴ Stephen Ellis, "The Mask of Anarchy – The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimensions of an African Civil War", 2007, p. 56.

⁹⁵ Mats Utas, "Malignant Organisms – Continuities of State-Run Violence in Rural Liberia", in Eds. Kapferer & Bertelsen, *Crisis of the State: War and Social Upheaval*, 2009, p. 268.

Movement of Liberia (ULIMO) was one such group, which soon came to split into two separate forces, ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K. Meanwhile other rebel groups were born, such as Liberian Peace Council (LPC), as well as groups with localised regional support such as the Lofa Defence Force (LDF).⁹⁶ After seven years of war, Charles Taylor and his political party National Patriotic Party (NPP) – formed out of the NPFL – won the Presidential elections in 1997, in competition between the different rebel factions that had emerged, leaving Taylor as the new Liberian President.

In 1999 war broke out again. The security situation had remained uncertain in 1998 and 1999, but it was in late 1999 in Lofa County that a first series of armed attacks occurred. A new rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), emerged and by the spring of 2003 managed to enter Monrovia. The core of LURD's rebel soldiers were Liberians returning from exile in Guinea, but the movement also came to recruit young people in Liberia. LURD also relied heavily on mercenaries from Sierra Leone and Guinea. As fighting continued the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) emerged, eventually operating in the south while LURD was still active in the north. The advancements of these rebel movements, combined with new international pressure on the Taylor government, finally forced Taylor into exile.⁹⁷ An interim government was established and the UN deployed its peacekeeping mission to Liberia.

Lingering rebel structures

Even though the first civil war officially came to an end in 1997, much of the everyday wartime reality remained the same for many of the former rebel soldiers in Liberia. War bureaucracy was preserved on an official level as the NPFL turned into a political party: the National Patriotic Party (NPP). The former warlord Charles Taylor was elected president and the security apparatus was maintained by former NPFL commanders. However, other ex-combatants also preserved wartime structures in informal networks. Mats Utas did fieldwork

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 268-269.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 270.

among ex-combatants in Monrovia during the first half of 1998. In a deserted factory in central Monrovia, known as “the Palace”, a dozen ex-combatants, originating from all over Liberia, had settled after the war. Some had been part of the NPFL or INPFL, and while some had remained loyal to these groups, others had joined sides with the LPC, LDF or the ULIMO factions or even the remnants of the AFL later in the war. Utas noted that there were few indications of Palace youth reintegration in larger society. Palace youth, as much of other footloose were part of a subculture much at odds with rest of the society. Although they had participated in various NGO-led rehabilitation and reintegration programmes at times, and even though they had learned a variety of skills in these programmes, very few were able to get stable work. Furthermore, the ex-combatants of the Palace appeared to have no intentions of returning to the communities they originated from. Some had lost their families; others tended to avoid their relatives. Utas found that family networks had been replaced with informal structures of wartime friends and commanders. In this sense the end of war had had little effect on the military structures of the Palace ex-combatants. The military structures were still used for maintaining discipline and to form patron/client networks, mainly populated by former commanders but reaching all the way up to governmental level. Through these links the ex-combatants of the Palace could be used by Monrovia Big Men for boosting political rallies or carrying out illegal activities.⁹⁸ Many ex-combatants had come from the margins of society, and enlistment with the various rebel factions was a means to escape this position and to gain a place at the centre of society. The rebel movements had accordingly been especially successful in recruiting from among the already marginalised and highly dissatisfied urban and semi-urban youth. Yet, as noted by Utas, for most ex-combatants, re-marginalisation rather than re-integration awaited by the end of the war. It is also highly conceivable that when Liberia once again was drawn back into warfare in 1999, many of the ex-combatants living at the Palace, with their military structures still in place, took up arms once more.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Mats Utas, “Building a future? The reintegration & remarginalisation of youth in Liberia”, in Ed. Paul Richards, *No Peace No War: an anthology of contemporary armed conflicts*, 2005, pp. 142-143.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 150-151.

I would suggest that what we can see from the example provided by Utas of ex-combatants in Monrovia is that rather than going home and seeking to restore earlier networks, their wartime experiences, the possibility of drawing on benefits from former commanders and even more importantly, from Big Men in the Liberian elite, as well as the lack of other employment opportunities made the ex-combatants prone to preserve their military structures and to keep their close relationship to each other. Since Liberia's post-war reality offered nothing more than re-marginalisation for many of the youths, remaining somewhat mobilised offered security. This maintained post-war mobilisation probably also facilitated the renewed recruitment during the second civil war. The birth of LURD and MODEL, based upon the former command structures of ULIMO, also bore evidence of this.

Evidently, the end of the first civil war did not lead to the dismantling of former rebel structures or chains of command, but neither did the end of the second war nor the signing of the official peace agreement in 2003. In 2005, Danny Hoffman found that the Duala neighbourhood at the outskirts of western Monrovia, which had been occupied by the LURD during the war, was still a central area for the ex-combatants. At the 'Johnson Yard', near the main Duala market in the densely packed neighbourhood, a former commander of the CDF and later in LURD lived with his family and other former fighters. Hoffman observed that as in so many other contexts, the ex-combatants from different factions, even this early in the post-conflict period, shared the area, as the factionalism that had divided them during the war no longer made any difference. A steady stream of ex-combatants that had served under the former commander came to visit him daily. The former commander had become a 'Big Man' of sorts, and the ex-combatants came to beg small favours, offer patronage payments or simply to check in. Hoffman had seen the same cycles of visitors during the years of war when the former commander lived in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and later in Liberia as he had helped rally troops for LURD. During the war he could mobilise fighters for war and assemble combatants for labour on the battlefield. At other times he could gather them for smaller operations like retrieving stolen goods or send them out for work in the region's mines or plantations. The commander thereby effectively controlled the labour of these youths.¹⁰⁰ As

¹⁰⁰ Hoffman, 2007, p. 417.

Hoffman suggests, areas such as Duala became spaces for organisation and deployment of violent labour with ex-combatants who at any moment, quickly and efficiently, could be called upon as labourers in different fields.¹⁰¹ The former commander's ability to utilise the wartime rebel structures also after the war, by mobilising the former fighters for smaller assignments, work on the rubber plantations or in the diamond mines, and the ex-combatants' need for economic opportunities and societal security provides an explanation for the lingering post-war rebel structures. In this sense, as was also shown by the example provided by Utas, the peacetime rationale for staying connected and mobilised followed much of the same logic as during the war. It shows further how former commanders can remain central nodes, even after the war is over, which will be examined in more detail in the case studies of this thesis.

Furthermore, Bøås and Hatløy in their research on militia membership and reintegration in Liberia, based on interviews with Liberian ex-combatants from various rebel factions, found that what caused Liberian youths to fight in the civil wars and join armed factions were mainly security concerns – for themselves, their families and communities. Regardless of which armed group they belonged to security was given as the most important reason for joining, based on various ideas regarding protection and opportunity.¹⁰² Bøås and Hatløy point out that even though the motives of the ex-combatants clearly could have changed during the war, their reasons for 'getting in' was neither very political nor overwhelmingly based on a desire for personal enrichment or due to idleness; it was based on the lack of security.¹⁰³ Following this rationale, and given that insecurity still prevails in Liberia, preserving the wartime networks, either as part of informal security groups or in other constellations, or to join them despite having a past as a rebel soldier seems like a rational strategy for individual, family or community protection, even though the war is over. In other words, ex-combatants, and others, at least from the point of view of personal and economic security, might have similar incentives to preserve or to join new informal security networks as they did during the war.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 402.

¹⁰² Morten Bøås and Anne Hatløy "Getting in, getting out: militia membership and prospects for re-integration in post-war Liberia", *Modern African Studies*, 46, 1, pp. 35-55, 2008, p. 45.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 50.

Post-war rebel networks as a security threat?

Along with the end of war came also the fear of post-war rebel networks. From 2003 onwards a series of reports on post-war insecurity emphasised the significant threat to peace and stability that organised networks of ex-combatants were believed to constitute. Many observers linked this to a failed DDRR process.¹⁰⁴ While the government of Liberia itself, by 2008, argued that the reintegration of ex-combatants had gone well, it admitted that some still posed a lingering security threat. According to their estimations approximately 9, 000 ex-fighters remained outside the reintegration and rehabilitation programmes, and these were the ones believed to pose local, national and regional security threats.¹⁰⁵ Post-war rebel networks involved in the exploitation of natural resources was one of the major concerns observers pointed out. Ex-combatants, organised by former rebel commanders and businessmen, were reported to be exploiting diamond, timber, gold and rubber resources with virtual impunity, generating significant income.¹⁰⁶ Post-war rebel networks were known to be operating in Guthrie and Sinoe rubber plantations, the diamond mining areas of Lofa, Nimba and Gbarpolu Counties, and the timber areas of Grand Bassa, River Cess and Sinoe Counties among other places, with the purpose of conducting illegal trade. These activities were seen to seriously undermine internal and external security.¹⁰⁷ The fears were that revenue from the ex-combatants' illegal trade in natural resources would to be used to fund rebel groups and renewed warfare, as was the case in the past. That the post-war rebel networks at the sites of their illegal occupations were behind human rights abuses against other Liberians. That the Liberian state would be further weakened by the loss of revenue and thereby be even less capable of dealing with present security risks and challenges. And finally, that post-war rebel networks, regardless of their activities, due to their organised presence and lingering command and control systems could easily be re-mobilised as mercenaries in the unstable region. The general, and seldom questioned, view on post-war rebel networks was accordingly

¹⁰⁴ See for example: Landmine Action, Feasibility Study into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Unregistered Ex-combatants, Guthrie Rubber Plantation, Liberia, September – December 2006 and Global Witness, 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Republic of Liberia, IMF, "Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy", 2008, p.56

¹⁰⁶ Global Witness, 2005, p.6.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p.12.

that these structures posed such an acute threat to peace and stability that they had to be dissolved immediately.

Liberian ex-combatants as informal security providers?

The main focus for this research is to analyse how and why rebel networks, despite years of absence of war, are still relevant in post-war Liberia. As explained in the section above, the general view on post-war rebel networks has been that these structures remained in order to illegally exploit natural resources and as a potential source for re-mobilisation for renewed warfare, made possible due to inadequacies in the formal reintegration process. This thesis does not question such explanations. However, I do find such theories incomplete. I therefore search beyond such assumptions of why post-war rebel networks exist. To find answers to my research questions, I will examine former rebel soldiers' ability to transform and adapt to the present post-war security political situation while making use of their organisation structures and skills in security provision obtained as rebels during the wars. The security political situation in Liberia, with weak formal security institutions with low capacity and a history of predatory behaviour, has created an environment where informal initiatives for security and protection are called upon. In such an environment informal security groups or networks have a natural platform. Given that insecurity prevails in Liberia – even though the levels of insecurity and violence clearly cannot be compared to the levels during the wars – some of those men and women who now have the status of ex-combatants might have the same reasons to remain a part of post-war rebel networks, and through them joining vigilante or other informal security groups, as they had during the wars. A contributing reason for them being mobilised could hence still be out of security concerns, based on ideas of protection of themselves, their families and their communities, as Bøås and Hatløy write of the incentives of wartime recruits. Seen from this perspective, ex-combatants in post-war vigilante or informal security groups could thereby be perceived as a continuation of wartime mobilisation. The post-war rebel structures could be seen in this light as a reflection of the continued insecurity in post-war Liberia.

Yet from another perspective, pre-war Liberia also suffered from insecurity, with state structures either incapable or unwilling to provide its citizens with protection. Being organised again, in different types of informal security groups could then also be seen as a consequence or continuum of the Liberian pre-war situation. As Abrahams noted in his early analysis of vigilantism in Tanzania, although these groups posed problems for the state – and their lack of a formal legal base and their resorting to illegal activities could clearly be stressed – one of the most interesting aspects of these group, Abrahams argues, was the depth of the widely-shared desire for peace and order which led to their emergence and which genuinely seems to inform most of their activities.¹⁰⁸ Following this logic, I would argue that rebel structures maintained in informal security groups in post-war Liberia paradoxically could be interpreted as both a continuation of war as well as a striving for peace and security.

However, as has been stressed, I am not only interested in post-war rebel networks that have emerged as vigilante groups and as providers of local informal security for individuals and communities. Networks of former rebels involved in informal security provision due to political or commercial interests are also a main concern here. Actors within the Liberian elite and the formal state apparatus may have an interest in making use of and gaining influence over these structures. As the ex-combatants have the ability to both provide security and create insecurity, this can make them valuable assets if they stay mobilised. In the following case studies, based on original interview material and findings from my fieldwork in Liberia, I will illustrate how post-war rebel networks are organised and operate in the informal security arena while attempting to describe the rationale behind these lingering features of war. By doing so I intend to give further examples of how the adaptive capacity of former rebel soldiers is utilised by various Liberian actors. Based on the arguments above, I attempt to show how and why this re-mobilisation or maintenance of rebel structures could be in line with the interests of former rebels, key influential actors within the Liberian elite, formal state institutions as well as ordinary Liberian citizens, seeking protection and basic security in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, this analysis will also seek to explore potential risks that this post-

¹⁰⁸ Abrahams, 1987, p. 196.

war development poses to the general security situation and for renewed fighting and warfare in Liberia and in the wider West African region.

Conclusion

To understand why rebel networks do not simply vanish in the transition from war to peace, despite efforts to demobilise and reintegrate ex-combatants, this thesis analyses hidden and explicit motives of ex-combatants (former rebel commanders specifically), the Liberian political and economic elite, formal security institutions and ordinary Liberian citizens for wishing these networks to stay organised. Accordingly, the thesis analyses whether there in fact exists a *need* among these actors for post-war rebel networks. To investigate this further the theoretical starting point of this research has been the often-neglected informal security context in order to understand why post-war rebel networks can and do reappear in the shape of informal security networks post-war. As the theoretical framework presented in the previous section of this chapter shows, formal security institutions have often failed to provide citizens with basic security in places like Liberia. Distrust in these institutions has made people turn to alternative solutions to cope with everyday life and safeguard their basic human security. In the Liberian case, weak formal security institutions with low capacity and a history of predatory behaviour have created an environment where informal initiatives for security and protection are called upon. In this environment, ex-combatants have found a way to function as informal security providers by using their wartime networks, connections and skills in their security and intimidation capabilities.

For **ordinary citizens** the motives behind wanting the continued mobilisation of such networks is thereby based on a need to find protection, as post-war rebel networks – among other things – function as vigilantes in neighbourhoods where the police might be incapable or unwilling to operate. In such cases, ex-combatants might be community members' best options for protection. Yet, to use ex-combatants as protectors is believed to entail many risks, as the ex-combatants are feared to act more violently than others without a combatant past,

and because there is a great risk of impunity if these actors decide to take the law into their own hands.

The motives for **formal security institutions and authorities** to see the continued presence of post-war rebel networks as an advantage might not be so obvious. But as theories on vigilantism explain, formal and informal security institutions often co-exist when state capacity is low. In such instances, formal authorities can call upon informal actors unofficially to act as security providers, or to cooperate with formal security providers to strengthen their capacity to protect ordinary citizens. Yet, the increasing delegitimization of formal institutions, as well as impunity and mob violence, are believed to be among the risks these actors must take into consideration when using informal security providing networks.

For the **political and economic elite** there are often hidden motives for promoting the continued existence of post-war rebel networks. Officially a government, and in this case the Liberian one, would argue that they would do anything in their power to break up wartime networks as there are great risks of continued violence, or even renewed violence, if these networks are not abandoned and the ex-combatants are not reintegrated. But as the case studies of this dissertation will show, there can be both political and financial gains to be made for these actors by unofficially utilising post-war rebel networks. The forthcoming chapters will reveal, for example, how the political and financial elite made financial gains by their unofficial cooperation with the post-war rebel network that had taken over one of the most important rubber plantations in Liberia, while they officially struggled at the same time to evict the ex-combatants from the plantation. Later, when the ex-combatants were finally removed from the command of the plantation the management continued to use them as informal security providers, both due to their capacity for intimidation (as other workers could be threatened into carry out their job even when the management failed to pay them), and due to their skill and knowledge in security and protection in general. Another example provided in this dissertation reveals how such networks can be used to mobilise votes, show force or simply as personal bodyguards for the elite. But beyond these examples, we will see

in chapter three how the political elite in West Africa have also used post-war rebel networks for what is often feared most: renewed warfare.

The **ex-combatants** themselves can have several motives for remaining in or attaching themselves to a rebel network post-war. For example, in a society like the Liberian one there are not many employment opportunities, but, through connections, a post-war rebel network can provide temporary informal employment opportunities, often in providing informal security. Relying on other ex-combatants can also be a social security net, as many have spent years with their fellow combatants while their links have been weakened to family or others who could provide social security might. But by preserving their wartime connections and “ex-combatant identity”, ex-combatants are also at risk of being stigmatised as violent or unpredictable, which in turn might lead to social exclusion or be a disadvantage when it comes to their chances of securing employment opportunities. Accordingly, ex-combatants must carefully weigh the risks and advantages that may come with a preserved ex-combatant identity and a post-war rebel network.

Former **rebel commanders**, if they have managed to preserve good connections both to the elite and ex-combatants beneath them, often have a special position in post-war rebel networks. If they manage to attach themselves to the right ‘Big Man’, they can secure benefits for ex-combatants in their networks such as employment opportunities and thereby economic support. This can make a former commander strategically important both for the elite actors who use them to mobilise ex-combatants for whatever purpose, and for the ex-combatants whom the former commander or leader of the post-war rebel network calls upon for such mobilisation. Former commanders can thereby have more to gain than lower ranking ex-combatants, as their direct connections to the elite in turn also can lead to better societal and employment opportunities (even formal ones as we shall see examples of in the chapters to come). But former commanders or others who have leading positions in post-war rebel networks also have more to lose than lower ranking ex-combatants. If former commanders attach themselves to the wrong ‘Big Man’; for example a losing candidate in a political election (more on this in chapter four), they are at risk of standing without any support after such an

event, while they also might be especially targeted by the winning side, as they are more easily identified than other ex-combatants without prominent positions.

Why post-war rebel networks are important

Networks are important in most people's lives. In Liberia they are vital. Involuntary independency can be a danger in any society, but in countries where the state and formal institutions are weak, people are forced to rely on other security nets. As Caroline Bledsoe argues in relation to networks of political patronage, people within a political climate of uncertainty and instability seek powerful mediators who can use personal influence to get them jobs and scholarships, and protect them from heavy-handed government bureaucrats, for example. Bledsoe use the notion of '*being for*' someone else or other people to explain this type of patronage politics. And in such a context a patron figure (big person) whom one is 'for', Bledsoe notes, can be a chief, landlord, teacher, parent, senior wife, or older sibling. Whether such a person is kin is, however, less important than their capacity to perform mediative and protective functions.¹⁰⁹ Under such preconditions networks are shaped and sustained. People need patrons (Big Men) and the networks that come with them for their everyday security, whether it be for livelihood, protection against violence, or for other social reasons. Most people have several 'Big Men' and are simultaneously attached to several networks. For my informants, post-war rebel networks have become one of their most important safety nets. They rely on kin and other important relations as well, but these networks can from time to time provide them with employment opportunities that otherwise would be closed to them, which is one of the key factors behind ex-combatants' decisions to attach themselves to such structures. But as is argued in this thesis, it is due to the fact that many actors find post-war rebel networks useful that they have remained important – not only the ex-combatants themselves, but actors from the elite to ordinary citizens – to Liberian society, for good and bad.

¹⁰⁹ Caroline Bledsoe, "'No Success Without Struggle': Social Mobility and Hardship for Foster Children in Sierra Leone", *Man* (N.S) 25, 70-88, 1990, p. 75.

Furthermore, these networks' informal character is key for their continued survival. For the ex-combatants this means that they can use them when they need them, or be more or less active within them, when opportunity is given. A big political event such as an election for example can expand such networks, as this can bring new opportunities for ex-combatants (as seen in chapter four). At other times, other networks might be more important for individual ex-combatants. For the elite the informal character of such networks is crucial for their use of these structures. Elite actors can continue to use these networks unofficially under such circumstances when it serves their purposes, without having to declare this publicly. The elite can use them unofficially from time to time without formally having to bear the responsibility for the risks of doing so. Post-war rebel networks can, in other words, be perfect political tools due to their official invisibility, as they have been formally demobilised but unofficially been maintained. In such circumstances, post-war rebel networks can remain relevant long after war has been declared over.

3. Regional wars and recycled rebels?

The re-mobilisation of Liberian post-war rebel networks in times of war and crisis in West Africa

This is a thesis on post-war rebel networks. It is a thesis on the forces and mechanisms allowing, and calling for, networks of ex-combatants to linger long after war has come to an end. In the following chapters I attempt to illustrate the continued importance these networks have, for both the ex-combatants themselves and the Liberian economic and political elite, several years after the peace agreement was signed. Accordingly, as outlined in the introduction, the emphasis in this thesis is on *post-war* Liberia and the period after 2003, when war had been declared officially over. Yet, this chapter will commence elsewhere, and take us back to the emergence of the Liberian civil war in 1989 and continue through the turbulent and violent years that followed in the whole region up until the end of war in 2003. This chapter will begin with the stories of three young Liberian men, whose backgrounds, as sons of high ranking army officers, under President Samuel Doe's rule, came to shape their lives and war trajectories. Having belonged to the ethnic Krahn minority, favoured by Doe, Michael, Simon and Jacob's¹¹⁰ lives dramatically changed when war began in 1989 and their Krahn identity and fathers' military positions were turned against them. Difficult circumstances, coincidence and active choices draw the three young men in to active combat. They became soldiers, rebels, commanders, regional warriors and eventually ex-combatants. One of them also spent years in prison. They became part, but also mobilisers, of strong networks based on wartime rebel structures that came to affect their lives long after the wars in Liberia were over.

From the early 1990s, not only was war raging in Liberia but large parts of West Africa were in different stages of crisis. Civil war had broken out in Sierra Leone in 1991 as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, backed by Charles Taylor, eventually came to challenge President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah's rule. Guinea and President Lansana Conté had to face the

¹¹⁰ In order to protect the identity of my informants, Michael, Simon and Jacob's real names will not be used in this thesis.

consequences of the neighbouring wars as hundreds of thousands refugees throughout much of the 1990s fled the violence across the Guinean borders. As we shall see, President Conté and the political and military elite were also actively involved in these wars. As a result of their taking sides against Taylor, incursions on Guinean soil were one of the results that became a reality for Conté and the Guinean population. By following the young Liberian men in this chapter, through this time of war and crisis, we will move across West African borders and discover how the mobility of the rebels, in addition to the antagonisms, or loyalties, between the ruling political actors in the region, entangled the conflicts to such a degree that it was impossible to tell where one stopped and the other one began or whether the different conflicts in fact just were one great West African war, with different battlefields.

The logic behind post-war rebel networks and how individual ex-combatants like Michael, Simon and Jacob,¹¹¹ on the one hand, and the Liberian political and financial elite, on the other, made strategic use of these structures following the end of the war is at the very centre of analysis in this thesis and will be highlighted in the subsequent chapters. We will follow these networks as illegal plantation occupiers, informal security providers, neighbourhood vigilantes and security forces mobilised for the Liberian presidential elections. Each case will give us further insights into why these structures simply did not vanish with the end of the war, how they function and why they have become so relevant in the post-war context. However, the post-war rebel networks were in these cases not used in their capacity as combatants, or with any obvious attempt at renewed warfare. The use of the very same networks in this chapter differs. The young Liberian men and their network of former rebels, became valuable to regional elites *specifically* due to their combatant past and their readiness to be used in warfare, as soon as the first Liberian civil war had come to an end, in a still turbulent time of violence and crisis in West Africa. As we shall see, the on-going war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, the crisis in Guinea, and the instability in the whole Mano River

¹¹¹ This chapter was written based on several interviews and conversations with Michael, Simon and Jacob during periods of fieldwork in Liberia between 2009 and 2013. My first meeting with Simon was in 2009, while my first meeting with Michael was in 2011. However, Michael is the one of my three informants mentioned in this chapter whom I have had the most frequent contact with during the years. Jacob and I met for the first time in 2013.

region¹¹² continued to impact the young men's lives despite the recently acquired peace in Liberia following Charles Taylor's coming to power as the new Liberian president in 1997. In fact, Taylor's success, and later election victory, forced ex-combatants who had been opposed to him into exile. But the forced exile did not shatter the networks of rebels. Outside Liberia, at least for these men, their links to each other were rather strengthened.

In this chapter, with its point of departure in Michael, Simon and Jacobs's stories, we will discover how post-war rebel networks in regions of instability can be used for what is often feared the most in relation to ex-combatants: renewed warfare in neighbouring conflicts. Through the trajectories of Michael and Simon in particular (Jacob's story as a combatant, as we will discover, took quite a different turn) and other young Liberian rebel soldiers, we will see how actors within the regional elites efficiently tapped into the networks of Liberian rebels in exile, using former commanders as entry points and mobilisers. We shall see how these networks were drawn into the regional dimension of the on-going West African wars and crises, where combatants were moved over international borders, recruited and mobilised by the political elite in the region in their struggle for power and influence. Michael, Simon and Jacob's and other former Liberian rebel soldiers' stories illustrate how post-war rebel networks even after the first Liberian civil war proved to be of significant importance to the regional elites. If they stayed mobilised, organised and well connected, and willing to once again use their skills in warfare, that is. We shall also discover how essential these networks are for the individual combatant, both in times of war and post-war and how devastating it can be for a former rebel soldier to be excluded from such a network, as the story of Jacob will bear witness to.

Becoming a rebel

Growing up in Liberia in the 1970s Michael, Simon and Jacob were only young boys when the military coup that brought the twenty-eight year-old Master Sergeant Samuel Doe to power

¹¹² The Mano River region refers to the West African countries Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The actual Mano River originates in the Guinea highlands and forms a border between Liberia and Sierra Leone. In the international association for economic cooperation the Mano River Union (MRU) Cote d'Ivoire is also included.

in 1980 came to change their lives dramatically. Doe had been one of the seventeen soldiers who murdered president Tolbert on April 12 that year. He was also the one who became accepted as nominal head of state and co-chairman of the new junta, known as the People's Redemption Council (PRC), who declared that power now was in their hands. Even though coups occurred frequently in West Africa at this point in time, the events in Liberia in 1980 were quite different from what people had been accustomed to by then due to the bloody and highly public manner in which the former government representatives were killed. Thirteen leading members of the former government were passed before a tribunal and executed in a public display on the beach in Monrovia, convicted of corruption a few days after the coup. The new administration, however, purported that they had liberated Liberia and were acting on behalf of indigenous Liberians repressed by the Americo-Liberian elite. The junta was thereby initially very popular, and people celebrated in carnival mood on the streets of Monrovia.¹¹³ However, Doe, himself an ethnic Krahn, soon revealed that it was not the indigenous Liberians, but himself and his own group in particular that he intended to favour. As noted by Amos Sawyer, for example, Doe's military dictatorship was responsible for extensive assaults on vital institutions of Liberian society, reaching all the way down to the level of villages where chiefs and elders were replaced. Doe's brutal regime was challenged by students, religious leaders and even fellow military officers, but many opponents were murdered, imprisoned or forced to flee the country.¹¹⁴ For Michael, Simon and Jacob, as sons of generals, and a major, in Doe's army and being of Krahn origin, the new change of regime meant that they became part of the small privileged minority promoted during Doe's years in power.

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)'s senior leadership, like other institutions, had been dominated by Americo-Liberians, and resentment was strong among the indigenous lower ranks, who lacked the opportunities enjoyed by the officers corps. Yet, Doe's seizure of power did not bring about the change the lower-ranking soldiers might have hoped for. On the contrary, Doe set out to use the old discriminatory system when resuming power, instead of

¹¹³ Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy – The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimensions of an African Civil War*, Hurst & Company, 2007, pp. 55-56.

¹¹⁴ Amos Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder – Towards Democratic Governance in Liberia*, Lynne Rienner Publisher, Inc., 2005, pp. 18-19.

rejecting it, but to his own advantage. It was soon evident that Doe had no intention of getting rid of ethnic divisions. Instead, he manipulated them in a new manner, filling the most important military positions with his ethnic Krahn, while at the same time purging the army of ethnic Gios and Manos. As expressed by Adekeye Adebajo: Doe effectively turned the AFL into an “instrument of Krahn oppression”. This label came to follow the AFL throughout the civil wars.¹¹⁵ The Executive Mansion Guards, the Special Anti-Terrorist Unit and all four infantry battalions were headed by Krahns soon after the coup.¹¹⁶ And it was especially the Gios and Manos who were victimised under the rule of Doe and at the hands of the army. One incident that stands out, and from which Taylor and his rebel forces could easily rally popular support due to the hatred of the Doe regime and the AFL it had created, was the massacre of an estimated 3,000 Gio and Mano citizens in Nimba County by Doe’s Krahn-dominated army in 1985.¹¹⁷ The former AFL commander and Doe’s fellow coup-maker, General Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio from Nimba County who Doe had forced into exile due to his growing popularity, had returned to Monrovia in November 1985, crossing the Sierra Leonean border, with his men aiming to overthrow Doe from power. But the coup failed and Doe unleashed the AFL massacre of Gios and Manos in Nimba County in revenge, both within the AFL’s own ranks and among the civilian population. The Krahn dominated soldiers burned villages and killed indiscriminately. And even though Nimba County was the epicentre of the purge, killings of Gios and Manos were also reported in Monrovia and Grand Gedeh County.¹¹⁸ But Doe lived to regret his brutality, as Gios and Manos thereby mobilised against him when Charles Taylor and the NPFL rebels gave them the opportunity in 1989. For Michael and Simon, who had grown up with the privilege of being Krahns and sons of army generals, and Jacob a son of an AFL major, the NPFL rebellion and the subsequent fall of Doe in 1990 put their lives in great danger. Krahns were now among those targeted by the rebels, and the hatred of the AFL had grown strong.

¹¹⁵ Adekeye Adebajo, *Liberia’s Civil War: Nigeria, ECOMOG and Regional Security in West Africa*, Lynne Rienner Publisher, Inc., 2002, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 26

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 30.

Michael and Jacob were first cousins, sons of two brothers. They grew up far from each other, Jacob in a quarter nearby the army barracks where the AFL men were living with their families in Monrovia and Michael in Sinoe County. Nevertheless, during his whole childhood Jacob was sent to Sinoe during the holidays, which made Michael and Jacob good friends from an early age. Simon was Jacob's best friend growing up in Monrovia, while Michael and Simon also knew each other well, both through Jacob and their fathers. But the war was to bring the three young men even closer. The two brothers', Michael and Jacob's, fathers, were killed in battle with Taylor's forces early on in the war, while Simon's father fled the country. With their families shattered and war upon them, the three young men had to find protection. For Michael, Simon and Jacob, this meant taking up arms. As violence escalated in 1992 and as several rebel factions emerged, Michael, who had now reached the age of seventeen, voluntarily joined the AFL. At this point the Liberian army recruited heavily among young Krahn men to get a stronger force against the rebels, as most men of other ethnic groups had already left the army. From 1990 the AFL were able to mobilise support by promising to protect Krahns and Mandingos. Mandingos, like the Krahns, were regarded as Doe collaborators and targeted in revenge for the systematic violence and previous massacre on Gios and Manos in Liberia. But as noted by Stephen Ellis, by 1993 at the latest, the army, as other armed factions, had ceased to credibly represent the interests of any ethnic group or any ideology. As Ellis argues, all factions were – at this point in time – best identified by reference to their leaders' personality and public profile and the identity of their external alliances.¹¹⁹ It was also during these developments that Michael decided to follow a new leader. In 1993 a small group of fighters broke away from the army to form the predominately Krahn rebel group Liberian Peace Council (LPC), led by George Boley. Michael, now an eighteen-year-old rebel soldier, was part of the group, which mainly fought Taylor's forces in south-eastern Liberia. Boley, a Krahn politician, had served as a minister under both Tolbert and Doe and had been able to gather about 2,500 combatants for his LPC.¹²⁰ While Michael continued to fight for Boley and the LPC, Simon, only a few years older, had chosen a similar path. Just like Michael, following in their fathers' footsteps, Simon had joined the AFL after the war had started, as the unleashed violence was now turned against the Krahns. But as

¹¹⁹ Stephen Ellis, "Liberia's Warlord Insurgency", in Ed. Clapham, Christopher, *African Guerillas*, James Currey Ltd, 1998, p. 157.

¹²⁰ Adekeye Adebajo, "Building Peace in West Africa – Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau", *International Peace Academy Occasional Paper Series*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002, p. 47.

Michael followed George Boley at the emergence of the LPC, Simon came instead to fight the NPFL from within the other main rebel group at that time, ULIMO. The ULIMO had been founded in 1991 in Sierra Leone by leading Krahn and Mandingo politicians. In early 1994, ULIMO had split into two factions along ethnic lines. The roughly 3,800-man-strong Krahn-dominated ULIMO-J was headed by Roosevelt Johnson, while the Mandingo dominated ULIMO-K, with about 6,800 fighters, was led by Alhaji Kromah.¹²¹ Jacob's destiny during the war was entangled with both Michael and Simon's. In 1991, when he was only seventeen, Jacob, like Simon, joined ULIMO. An army officer called Charles Dent¹²² had left the AFL for ULIMO, and this man became Jacob's entry point to the rebel movement. Dent was commanding a unit of illiterate rebels. For this reason, Dent approached Jacob, whom he knew through his father. Jacob had been just about to graduate from high school when war broke out and the life he knew drastically changed. With his family shattered and violence all around him, Dent instead became his chance to find protection. Jacob was recruited to become what he himself calls commander Dent's '1st sergeant', and in this position he was to keep the records for Dent and therefore followed him everywhere, taking notes and documented all that Dent needed for his ULIMO unit. In this way Jacob could climb the hierarchies of the rebel system fast, and he soon became a commander himself.

In 1993, Jacob was reunited with Michael again. A peace conference had been held in July the same year, and a cease-fire had been agreed upon. But Taylor was slow to disarm and renewed violence was soon a fact. It was during this turmoil that the LPC had been born. According to Jacob, they were initially fifty-two men with George Boley as their leader. Both Jacob and Michael had, despite their young age, been successful during the war. They had managed to climb the hierarchy and were chosen as two of the main commanders close to Boyle. And their close relation to the rebel leader continued during the time Boley himself gained a new formal status, which happened only a few years later. On August 19, 1995, the Abuja Agreement was signed, in yet another attempt at achieving peace in Liberia. The peace treaty set up a Council of the State of Liberia, which was to consist of five members and a chairman, a position Charles

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Charles Dent was later to become a top commander in the emerging rebel group LURD (LURD will be discussed more fully later in this chapter) and chief of staff. Dent was killed in battle in 2001, however, and the top military position was passed to Prince Seo. For more details on LURD leadership and chains of command see for example Barbazon 2003.

Taylor insisted on gaining. Two of the other invited members came from the warring factions: Alhaji Kromah from the ULIMO-K and Michel and Jacob's leader, George Boley of the LPC.¹²³ Boley thereby held a formal state position once more and new authority – authority that was to bring new benefits for men like Michael and Jacob who had remained loyal to him during the war. Boley saw to it that Jacob got a position as a police captain in 1995. Jacob had gone from being a young rebel soldier to now being part of the formal security system. Things were looking good for him, and he was enjoying his new influence. But the situation was to change rapidly. The invitation of warring faction leaders into the new government did not bring about the long-awaited peace in Liberia this time around either. Fighting continued between Taylor's NPFL forces and Boley's LPC in the southeast, between the two wings of ULIMO in the west and between the NPFL and ULIMO-K in Bong County.¹²⁴ Finally, in 1996, after thirteen broken peace deals and seven years of raging civil war, the "Abuja II" talks were initiated, and a political climate emerged in which elections could be held. The security situation was far from perfect in Liberia at this time, but there was a presence of Nigerian peacekeepers and relative stability within the coalition government. Charles Taylor, however, dominated the Liberian political environment. This was clearly reflected in the election results, as the former rebel leader and his National Patriotic Party (NPP) won a landslide victory in 1997.¹²⁵ It has been debated whether Taylor won due to the Liberian public's fear of post-election violence and a return to conflict were he to face an electoral defeat, or simply because this was a result of Liberians finding Taylor and the NPP to be the only likely candidates to control a deteriorating security situation.¹²⁶ For Michael, Simon and Jacob and others who had been opposing Taylor during war, the election result was nothing short of a disaster.

The Camp Johnson Road combatants

War had separated Simon from Michael and Jacob for years, but Taylor's success brought the three childhood friends together again. In September 1998, fighting broke out at Camp Johnson Road in Monrovia. The antagonists were mainly ULIMO-J and LPC combatants, on the

¹²³ For more details on the peace treaty see the "Abuja Agreement" (1995), United Nations Security Council, S/1995/742.

¹²⁴ Adebajo, 2002, p. 183.

¹²⁵ David Harris, *Civil War and Democracy in West Africa – Conflict Resolution, Elections and Justice in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, I.B. Tauris & co Ltd, 2012, pp. 153 -154.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

one side, and Taylor's forces, on the other. Krahn fighters, from different rebel factions, had gradually been building up an increasingly strong presence around the ULIMO-J leader Roosevelt Johnson in the Camp Johnson Road area after Taylor's election victory in 1997.¹²⁷ According to Michael, the Krahn fighters had gathered around Roosevelt Johnson not on the basis of former rebel affiliation but simply for protection due to targeted violence and intimidation against them by Taylor's forces. Taylor was using his new presidential powers and reconstituted national army to move against Roosevelt Johnson, and it was said that anyone associated with him and his base in the ethnic Krahn region of the southeast was being picked up and "disappearing" from Monrovia.¹²⁸ As Taylor's powers grew, the Krahn fighters felt more and more unprotected, which both strengthened former alliances among them and created new ones as they assembled at Camp Johnson Road. The new government nevertheless claimed that Johnson was building up a new force in order to launch a coup. Whether this was true or not, on September 18 Charles Taylor ordered the paramilitary unit Special Operation Division to attack the camp. After intense fighting, leaving over fifty dead, Roosevelt Johnson and a group of combatants took refuge at the U.S Embassy. From there they were evacuated to Sierra Leone and Nigeria.¹²⁹ Michael and Simon who had been caught up in the heavy battles were among those who managed to escape Taylor's forces and reach the embassy. Along with a group of about twenty other Liberian fighters, they were flown to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, by the U.S Embassy.

The Camp Johnson Road incident had a quite different ending for Jacob. Jacob never managed to escape Taylor's forces and was shot in the spinal cord. Still, Jacob was lucky. His men quickly took him to a hospital. Jacob was told that he would never walk again. But several weeks later Jacob nevertheless managed to stand up and walk out of the hospital. He was, however, in the worst imaginable condition, and he was frightened. He knew that Taylor's men were after him, and he knew that he had to go into hiding. But in his fragile condition, Jacob could not travel far. Together with seven other men from his former rebel unit, he took refuge at his

¹²⁷ For more information on the Camp Johnson Road fighting in 1998 see for example International Crisis Group Report, No. 43, "Liberia: The key to ending regional instability", April, 2002, p.8 and Adebajo, Adekeye, *Liberia's Civil War: Nigeria, ECOMOG and Regional Security in West Africa*, 2002, p. 233.

¹²⁸ Mary H. Moran, *Liberia – The Violence of Democracy*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 123.

¹²⁹ International Crisis Group, 2002, p. 8.

aunt's house in the outskirts of Monrovia. But Jacob and the other men were soon found and arrested. They were taken to Monrovia Central Police Station, where they were imprisoned immediately. They spent six months there, without a trial, Jacob says, nineteen men connected to the Camp Johnson incident, most of them Krahn. He, like many others, was later convicted and sentenced for treason.

Jacob came to spend years in his prison cell, at times so ill that he feared for his life. But against the odds, Jacob survived this ordeal as well. Meanwhile, Taylor still held power in Liberia, but across neighbouring borders, a rebellion against him was rising. The Liberian United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was born. A movement with external support and resources but consisting of many of the very combatants forced into exile after the Camp Johnson Road incident. From 1999 and onwards, the rebels came to pose an increasing threat to Taylor's new-won power, and he needed to use every means at his disposal to fight them. In this way, Jacob and the combatants taken as prisoners at Camp Johnson Road became of interest to the Liberian president. As we shall see in the pages below, Michael, Simon and many of the combatants whom Jacob knew and had fought with for years were part of the new rebellion. Many of them, just like Michael and Simon, had strong links to the imprisoned Camp Johnson Road combatants, a fact Taylor calculated that he could possibly use. In March 2002, Charles Taylor suddenly announced that he was to release twenty-one prisoners convicted of treason who had been held at the Monrovia Central Prison since September 18, 1999, Camp Johnson Road battle.¹³⁰ Taylor was under pressure as LURD was pushing deeper into Liberia. Taylor's decision to now release the Camp Johnson combatants could therefore have been seen as a gesture aiming at creating an environment for peace talks. Yet Taylor could have had multiple, if not ulterior, motives.

Jacob was notified about the developments in prison, and he was told that he was to be released at once. But when Taylor's men came for him, he was not released but escorted to

¹³⁰ See for example: UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Liberia: Liberia humanitarian situation report March 2002", *ReliefWeb report*, available at: <http://reliweb.int/report/liberia/liberia-humanitarian-situation-report-mar-2002>.

Taylor himself. Jacob was taken to a compound in Monrovia where Charles Taylor received him in the garden, surrounded by his main commanders. These were men Jacob knew, and saw as his main antagonists. Taylor approached him, Jacob said, and told him the following: “I am the Commander in Chief, and your brothers are not here now. You will fight for me instead. I order you to take this money.” With that Taylor gave Jacob USD 7,000 and keys to a car that had been parked outside the compound. In that moment Jacob knew that he was trapped. There was no way he could say no to Taylor. He had been imprisoned for years, he was far away from the men he knew and trusted, and he felt alone and vulnerable. If he refused Taylor’s offer he knew he would be killed then and there. But if he joined him, he would lose the people most important to him, people he had grown up with, like Michael and Simon and others whom he not only had fought with, but shared his life with for years. And Jacob knew what the money was all about. People would see him, a man freed by Taylor, with money and a new car, and there would be no doubt that his loyalty had been bought. Jacob realised that no matter what he did he would lose. Taylor would either isolate him from his most important network and turn him against his own people or he would most likely take his life. In this way, Jacob came to fight for yet another leader. Under Taylor, Jacob came to command a unit of about 150 men based at the presidential mansion, protecting Taylor until the president was forced into exile in 2003 at the end of the war, following LURD’s advances and international pressure.

Things were never the same for Jacob after he joined Taylor. As the war ended Jacob was once again on the losing side. While Michael and Simon came to win great benefits from being part of a strong post-war rebel network, Jacob was never fully trusted by his former fellow combatants again. Michael and Simon still came to regard him as their brother, and helped him when they could. Yet Jacob was never trusted with any inside information, and he was never invited to take part in any of the network’s activities. Jacob had lost access to what proved to be vital for many ex-combatants following the end of the Liberian civil wars, his post-war rebel network.

Fighting in Sierra Leone

To return to the events that followed after the Camp Johnson Road incident in 1998, it soon became clear that Michael and Simon's lives as combatants did not end along with the termination of the first Liberian civil war, following Charles Taylor's election victory, or by their forced exile. In Sierra Leone the Liberian fighters were drawn into the regional dimension of the on-going West African wars instead, where they, like other combatants, were moved across international borders, recruited and mobilised by different actors within the political elite in the region who were battling each other for power. What happened to the two young men next shows how the networks of rebel soldiers created in Liberia during the first civil war immediately proved to be very useful for powerful actors within the region. As the situation was far from stable in West Africa, and violent struggle for power continued in neighbouring countries, post-war rebel networks that stayed mobilised and organised, and continued to be willing to use their skills in warfare, became highly valuable.

For the first three months the group of Liberian fighters that had been flown to Sierra Leone after the Camp Johnson incident were brought to the West African peacekeepers of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)'s base at Lungi airport outside Freetown. But the Sierra Leonean political elite soon proved to have plans for the Liberian ex-combatants. From Lungi, Michael and Simon and the other Liberians were relocated to a place called Brookfields Hotel. The situation in Sierra Leone was highly unstable at this point in time. The country had been at war since 1991, as a guerrilla force calling itself the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had launched a rebellion intent upon overthrowing President Joseph Saidu Momoh of the All People's Congress (APC). However, Momoh was deposed by his own army officers in a coup in 1992 – and Captain Valentine Strasser became the new head of state establishing the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). Even though the RUF's proclaimed reasons for fighting were gone, the war continued to rage between the rebel movement and the new regime. The NPRC started a heavy recruitment campaign among marginalised and excluded youths and quickly expanded the army and succeeded in pushing

the RUF back.¹³¹ By 1994, however, the RUF had regained its strength, and fighting continued. Nevertheless, neither the rebels nor the government were strong enough to achieve a total military victory, which opened up for peace negotiations. In February 1996, the first democratic elections were held and Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) took power. Despite the official end of war, neither side seemed much devoted to the peace, and no serious attempts to demobilise or disarm fighters were undertaken. In 1997, yet another military coup was carried out by the army, and a new regime – the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) under the leadership of Johnny Paul Koroma – was installed. The AFRC invited the RUF to join the military junta and, for more than eight months, the AFRC and the RUF held power. But with the help of the West African peacekeeping force the ECOMOG, the Kabbah regime was reinstalled by March 1998.¹³²

But the RUF rebels were not yet broken, and the Kabbah government was now looking for ways to use the exiled Liberian combatants to their advantage in the on-going war. Representatives of the Sierra Leonean government approached the group of Liberians which Michael and Simon were part of, offering them to take sides in the civil war against the RUF. The rebellions in Liberia and Sierra Leone had been intimately interlinked from the start, and one important aspect tying the wars together was the relationship between Charles Taylor and the RUF leader Foday Sankoh. Before the emergence of the wars both Taylor and Sankoh, like other key actors in the conflicts to come, had been hosted by the Libyan president Moammar Gaddafi as they prepared their troops for battle. Later, during the Sierra Leonean rebellion, Taylor and Sankoh's regional cooperation continued, and Taylor came to constitute a considerable source of support for Sankoh fighting the Kabbah government and was said to have committed his fiercest troops to the RUF.¹³³ Naturally, the Sierra Leonean president and the exiled Liberian combatants now approached by Kabbah's representatives had a common enemy.

¹³¹ Krijn Peters, *War and the Crisis of Youth in Sierra Leone*, International African Institute, London and Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 64-65.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 76-77.

¹³³ Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines – Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 34.

Ex-combatant recruitment at Brookfields Hotel

Before the war, the Brookfields Hotel, the place the exiled Liberian fighters were taken to, had been a meeting point for both local elites and international tourists, but beginning in 1997, the hotel was first used as a barracks for RUF rebels. When the rebels were driven out of Freetown in March 1998 and the Sierra Leone People Party (SLPP) government and President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah were put back in power, the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), who had been allied with the Sierra Leonean government, took Brookfields Hotel as its own barracks.¹³⁴ Several hundred combatants permanently or temporarily lived at the hotel with their dependants. Danny Hoffman, conducting field research at the barracks among the combatants at Brookfields Hotel before they were finally evicted in 2002, has described the hotel as a location that concentrated the labour force of a violent economy and oriented it towards deployment throughout Freetown and Sierra Leone, and even the whole region if necessary. The combatants at the hotel became a force that the SLPP government could use as insurgents against a renewed rebellion into the city or a coup by the state's armed forces. The forces meant to protect the Sierra Leonean leadership were hosted here, and the hotel served as a base for the Special Forces, the most professionalised contingent of the militia. From Brookfields Hotel, combatants were sent out to the frontlines in Sierra Leone, but it also became the major transit point for redeploying combatants into warfare in the wider region.¹³⁵ It was also here, at Brookfields Hotel, that Michael and Simon, along with the group of Liberian combatants flown out of Monrovia, were based in early 1999 when the SLPP government mobilised them for what came to be one of the most violent periods of the Sierra Leonean war, starting with the January 6 rebel invasion of Freetown. The group of Liberian rebels thereby came to fight on the Kabbah government side during the attacks.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp- 174-175.

¹³⁶ For more information on the January 6, 1999, rebel invasion and how the CDF was mobilised in support of the Sierra Leonean government see Danny Hoffman, 2011, p. 47. Utas and Jörgel, 2008, have described how the Kabbah government also strategically used former antagonists such as the West Side Boys (WSB) rebels to fight the AFRC/RUF attack. However, less is known and written about how Liberian fighters such as Michael and Simon were used by the Sierra Leonean authorities during this part of the war.

Nevertheless, the newly established alliance between the Sierra Leoneans and the exiled Liberian combatants soon crumbled. According to Michael, the Liberian fighters later in 1999 fell into a dispute with the Sierra Leonean authorities over the payment for their contribution during the January 6 invasion. The Kabbah government, Michael argues, refused to pay them in weapons and ammunition, as had been agreed upon. Kabbah and Taylor were enemies, but Kabbah was clearly anxious about Taylor's power and influence. Possibly Kabbah feared provoking Taylor by arming the exiled Liberians, knowing that this eventually could lead to a large-scale armed response on Sierra Leonean territory. The dispute between Kabbah and the Liberian combatants was not resolved; instead several of the Liberians were imprisoned in Freetown. Some of them nonetheless managed to escape the authorities. While Michael took refuge in Ghana in 1999, Simon somehow made his way to Guinea. Yet, as we shall see in the next section, the two young men's trajectories as combatants were once again to be shaped by the regional aspects of the West African conflicts and by the regional elites' mobilising post-war rebel networks, as well as new recruits for the on-going power struggles.

Liberian mercenaries in Guinea, regional mobilisation, and the emergence of the LURD

In Guinea, President Lansana Conté was facing a rebellion that was believed to be supported by Charles Taylor.¹³⁷ Since the wars started in the neighbouring countries, hundreds of thousands of Liberians and Sierra-Leoneans had taken refuge in Guinea. Guinea had been entangled in the neighbouring conflicts from the start but had still enjoyed relative stability. However, in the late 1990s the security situation quickly deteriorated as a series of cross-border raids were carried out from Sierra Leone. The attackers came across the borders, killed civilians, burned villages, looted and then retreated back to Sierra Leone. A furious President Conté immediately blamed Charles Taylor for being behind the attacks carried out by RUF rebels. But the attackers were not only foreigners. Guinean rebels calling themselves "Rassemblement des Forces Democratiques de Guinée" (RFDG) claimed that the attacks were

¹³⁷ See for example: Adekeye Adebajo, "Building Peace in West Africa – Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau", International Peace Academy Occasional Paper Series, 2002, p. 69.

the work of the Guinean opposition.¹³⁸ Accordingly, Conté found himself facing Sierra Leonean, Liberian and domestic rebels on his territory from the late 1990s onwards.

The turbulence in Guinea, and the hostile relationship between the two West African presidents Lansana Conté and Charles Taylor, came to give Simon and other Liberian combatants in exile in Guinea new opportunities to make use of their skills as combatants. Together they joined the Guinean army, hired as mercenaries by the Guinean president seeking to strengthen his army against the rebels. At this point, the situation in Guinea was extremely tense. In September 2000, a coalition of Taylor-sponsored Guinean rebels, the RFDG, and RUF fighters had been carrying out attacks in the country near the border with Sierra Leone and Liberia. The RFDG rebels now claimed they were intent on reaching the capital, Conakry.¹³⁹ Liberian mercenaries consequently became a valuable asset for Conté, as tensions between Guinea and Liberia rose and the security situation in Guinea deteriorated. For Simon and the exiled Liberian fighters, the situation in Guinea meant a way to make a living, using their experiences as rebels. They thereby continued their paths as mercenaries for a few months, aiding president Conté and the Guinean army. But they were soon needed for yet another war. Taylor's regime was no longer unthreatened as exiled Liberians, predominantly former ULIMO-K rebels, formed the rebel movement LURD. Moreover, the LURD leadership was closely linked to the Guinean government. Sekou Conneh, a former Liberian politician and businessman, had emerged as the rebel movement's chairman. Yet, with all certainty, a more important player for the establishment of the rebel movement was Conneh's wife, Aisha, the spiritual advisor of President Conté. Aisha Conneh, as we shall see, was not only one of the most important mobilisers of the new rebel group: she was also a key force behind President Conté's decision to back the rebellion.

¹³⁸ BBC News Africa, "The Guinea conflict explained", February 13, 2001, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1167811.stm>.

¹³⁹ See for example: International Crisis Group *Africa Report*, No. 62, "Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm", April 30, 2003, p. 11 and BBC News, "Guinea rebel attacks increase tensions", Monday, 18 September 2000, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/930191.stm>

In Guinea, Simon soon became part of the initial core force of LURD, and he was once again mobilised as a rebel commander. Meanwhile, it soon became evident that the destiny of Michael—who instead had taken refuge in Ghana—was also to be determined by the emerging rebel group. The new movement needed to mobilise combatants, and the leadership strategically sought to make use of post-war rebel networks. Michael, who had proved himself as a commander during his years of combat with the LPC and as a mercenary in Sierra Leone, was contacted by one of the movement's coordinators, a Liberian living in the USA at the time. Michael was tasked with recruiting former Liberian fighters, and for this assignment he could use the network of combatants he had established during the first Liberian war and during his time in Sierra Leone. In a highly organised manner the commanders that had been chosen as recruiters for the emerging rebel movement were sent out to different regions of West Africa. Michael was mainly responsible for recruiting in Côte d'Ivoire. He was given USD 1,500 for the assignment through his contacts in the USA. His travels were paid for, and money was sent to him via Western Union for paying his recruits. The recruits Michael had gathered were thereafter sent to Guinea. In Guinea Aisha Conneh was at the centre of coordination of the new movement.

Aisha Conneh, a former market woman in her mid-thirties, had grown up in Kakata, a small town in Margibi County in Liberia. But when war came she, like so many other Liberians, was forced to flee, and in 1990 she came to Guinea. The stories of how this young woman came to gain the trust of the Guinean president differ, but there is no doubt that she did do so and that, with the help of her powerful connections, she came to play a vital role in the making of the LURD. Michael, who came to work under the woman who sometimes was called 'the Iron Lady', was curious about how Conneh had gained her power and influence. His years at war had made him accustomed to always doing his own background research on the people he worked with. Aisha Conneh was known at the time as a spiritual advisor or soothsayer of the president. However, the circumstances of how she had gained this prestigious position were less known. According to what Michael found out, Aisha Conneh's first husband had either been aware of, or had even taken part in, the planning of a coup against President Conté. But Conneh's husband had fallen ill, and on his deathbed, he had revealed the plans to her. With her husband dead, Aisha decided to turn to the president with the information. But Aisha was

clever, Michael argues, so instead of telling the president the whole story, she presented the plan of the coup as a vision that had come to her in a dream. With the information provided by Aisha Conneh the Guinean authorities were able to thwart the coup, and from that moment Conneh could take her place as the new soothsayer of the president. “That woman could have been president herself”, Michael laughs when he tells me the story, “if she had had formal education too”. “She is very intelligent”, he says, “and she was far more valuable to LURD than her husband ever was”.¹⁴⁰ After her husband’s death, Aisha Conneh married his brother – Sekou Conneh – who subsequently became the chairman of the LURD, which secured the emerging rebel movement’s connections all the way to the highest level of the Guinean political elite. But even though Sekou Conneh was the chairman of LURD, it was Aisha Conneh who the new recruits often passed through after having been contacted by Michael or the other recruiters in the region. Michael, together with these other recruiters, was also called to meetings she organised in Conakry from time to time. It was evident that it was Aisha Conneh’s good connections with President Conté that helped channel the Guinean support to LURD.

As William Reno rightly has pointed out, LURD’s leaders sought external patronage on an opportunistic basis and, in this way, involved neighbouring states in their cause. However, as Reno notes, foreign politicians had become more adept at this point at using Liberian rebel groups such as LURD to serve their own purposes.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, Conté had good reasons to support the newly establish rebel movement and, of course, had his own agenda for doing so. The hostile relationship between Conté and Taylor was well known, and Guinea’s assistance to the new rebel movement was an open secret. LURD’s activities in Conakry were reported to be based at Aisha Conneh’s house, heavily protected by presidential guards under Guinean government supervision.¹⁴² It was also in there in the garden of Aisha Conneh’s house that Michael and the other recruiters met with her. Through Aisha Conneh, Guinean authorities

¹⁴⁰ The exact details of how Aisha Conneh came to win her influential and powerful position by President Conté’s side we may never know. However, many other statements, often less detailed, in general correspond with the account reported to me by Michael. In an ICG report from 2004, for example, it is stated that Aisha Conneh, by using her fortune-telling skills, forecasted a coup attempt against Conté in 1996, enabling her to replace Conté’s previous soothsayer. See; ICG *Africa Report* no 75, “Rebuilding Liberia: Prospects and Perils”, January 30, 2004, p. 10.

¹⁴¹ Reno, William, “Liberia: The LURDs of the New Church”, in Ed. Bøås, Morten and Kevin C. Dunn, *African Guerrillas – Raging against the machine*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007, pp. 69-70.

¹⁴² International Crisis Group, April, 2003, p. 11.

helped facilitate the recruitment of LURD forces. There were no doubts that the president's spiritual advisor was to have great influence on the Liberian war to come. LURD needed manpower and loyal combatants, preferably with fighting experience, and with Aisha Conneh's elite network such a mobilisation was easier to facilitate. One episode that illustrates Aisha Conneh's influence occurred during the mobilisation phase of the LURD. According to Michael, Aisha Conneh convinced President Conté to contact Sierra Leonean President Kabbah, persuading him to release the Liberian fighters who had been imprisoned after the January 6 rebel invasion – the group Michael and Simon had both been part of. However, Sierra Leonean support for the emerging rebel group was not as straight-forward as that provided by the Conté government. Possibly fearing attacks from Taylor, Kabbah supported the new rebellion in a more discreet manner than the Guinean president.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, after the unofficial Guinean request to release them, the Liberian fighters they were flown to Conakry, where they were united with Simon and the other combatants mobilised for the LURD.¹⁴⁴

In exchange for their role as mercenaries in the Guinean army, Michael argues that the exiled Liberians decided not to ask for money. Instead they wanted “humanitarian assistance”, as he himself calls it, from the Guinean political leadership to return to Liberia to fulfil LURD's only political aspiration: to oust Charles Taylor from power. “Instead of financial payment we chose the weapons”, Michael explains. They were thereby allowed to keep the weapons they had been given as mercenaries, in order for them to start their war against Charles Taylor. In the beginning the new rebel movement was composed of only 200-300 men, Michael states, but they “recruited and trained” along the way, as they pushed further into the country, and he believes that they could have been as many as 10,000 to 15,000 troops at their height. While Michael never took active part in the fighting this time around, Simon, now as a LURD general, once again entered Liberia in 1999, crossing the border from Guinea and entering Lofa County. According to estimations, LURD controlled about 30 per cent of Liberia by December 2002,

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁴⁴ This information given to me by Michael also corresponds with findings made by Ilmari Kähkö in his recent research on the evolution of LURD, as a statement from an interviewed top-level commander from the rebel movement confirms that arrested Liberians were released by the Sierra Leonean government and at least given tacit support following a request by Guinean officials. See; Kähkö, Ilmari, “‘Taylor Must Go’ – The Strategy of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy”, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 26:2, 248-270, 2015, p. 255.

from Voinjama and Zorzor in Lofa County and the Guinea border area, south to Saint Paul's Bridge, southwest to the town of Bopolu and east along the Sierra Leonean border to the outskirts of Foya. By early 2003, LURD forces had expanded their military presence considerably and were now also in control of Tubmanburg, Klay Junction, Foya, Robertsport, and key strategic areas in the immediate vicinity of Monrovia.¹⁴⁵ As noted by James Brabazon, the LURD, contrary to media reports on the rebel movement at the time, were not comprised of isolated groups of loosely affiliated rebels, but was a coherent and integrated mobile irregular army. Furthermore, the LURD's military structure operated along protocols established by the AFL and involved a coherent system of ranks and titles which appeared to be respected by most of its combatants. Combatants were promoted and awarded ranks based upon length of service, ability in the field in addition to previous military experience or affiliation. Former AFL or ULIMO fighters who entered the LURD also kept their former ranks.¹⁴⁶ The LURD was therefore, contrary to a common prejudice regarding African rebel groups, a well-organised and well-coordinated movement. The LURD's military strategic capabilities were illustrated by the way in which the movement's coordinators outside Liberia recruited former Liberian rebel commanders, like Michael, and gave them responsibility over specific geographic areas where these commanders' networks of former rebel soldiers were used to re-mobilise combatants all over West Africa for the emerging rebellion.¹⁴⁷ Another illustration is found in the movement's ability to use and channel the Guinean political elite's interests in a rebellion against Taylor in their warfare.

During the summer of 2003, fighting had reached the capital, which was one of the factors forcing Taylor into exile in August as peacekeepers arrived. The result was the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, putting an end to the civil wars in Liberia. However, the end of the war or the subsequent DDR process did not manage to shatter the wartime networks that Michael, Simon and Jacob had been part of this time around either. Instead, these networks became the means by which many ex-combatants secured a living post-war and a powerful instrument for the Liberian elite to enrich themselves and secure

¹⁴⁵ James Brabazon, "Liberia: Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)", The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Africa Programme, Briefing Paper No. 1, 2003, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁴⁷ For a recent analysis on the strategy and organisation of LURD see also Käihkö, 2015.

power. One example of this dynamic, as we shall see in the next chapter, was evident as former rebels took over one of the country's largest rubber plantation at the end of the war.

Conclusion

- *Networks of ex-combatants – always a threat to peace?*

One of the most fundamental aspects driving disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts in post-conflict environments is the fear that groups of ex-combatants will be mobilised for renewed warfare. This aspect has been identified both within conflict resolution research and has been clearly visible in actual peace-building interventions. Since the end of the Cold War international efforts to end prolonged conflicts in parts of Africa, Central America, and Southeast Asia have all included initiatives and programmes to disarm and demobilise combatants after years, and often decades, of war and military service.¹⁴⁸ As Anders Themnér notes, former fighters can pose the gravest threat to post-conflict societies if they participate in organised violence as members of illegal armed groups. This type of violence, Themnér states, not only inflicts the greatest loss in lives and property, it also has the potential of undermining the legitimacy of the newly established peace. And in the worst case, ex-combatant violence can have a detrimental effect on regional security.¹⁴⁹ Similarly Mats Berdal has argued that in the short to medium term, arms and combatants recently emerged from war are potential sources of both domestic and regional instability.¹⁵⁰ But networks of ex-combatants can also be a source a continued instability in a wider region long after war has been declared to be over. As this thesis aims to show, networks of ex-combatants, for several reasons, tend to linger many years after peace agreements have been signed, despite disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration processes. Yet, as will be argued for more fully in the chapters to come, these networks are mostly used not in their capacity as combatants or with any obvious attempt to start new warfare, but for other security-related assignments. This chapter differs from the subsequent cases of this thesis in this sense. In this chapter, post-

¹⁴⁸ Mats Berdal, "Disarmament and Demobilisation after Civil Wars – Arms, soldiers and the termination of armed conflicts", Adelphi Paper, 303, 1996, p. 5

¹⁴⁹ Anders Themnér, *Violence in Post-Conflict Societies – Remarginalization, remobilizers and relationships*, Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding, 2011, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁰ Berdal, 1996, p. 5.

war rebel networks have been used *specifically* in their capacity as combatants, as mobile warring networks with the ability to be used in a wider context of regional conflict. Themnér, in his research on why some communities of ex-combatants re-engage in organised violence while others do not, argues that there is an increased risk for renewed organised violence if the ex-combatant community is remarginalised after the arrival of peace due to a lack of political influence, personal security or economic assistance. He also notes, however, that such re-engagement in organised violence often requires the involvement of domestic and regional elites, as well as lower-level actors such as local politicians, communal leaders or former mid-level commanders who can serve as a link between the elite and the ex-combatants.¹⁵¹ This assumption is well in line with the reasoning in this chapter. One of the main and overall arguments of this thesis is, as discussed, that post-war rebel networks tend to linger long after peace agreements have been signed and despite DDR initiatives. However, contrary to what is often assumed, and usually taken as a given, I argue that the maintenance of post-war rebel structures is not *necessarily* a bad thing or a threat to lasting peace. Of course, it can be, but such a negative development where networks of ex-combatants are used for renewed warfare never occurs without the involvement of elite actors, and substantial financial resources. If this happens, lingering networks can, have a great and devastating impact on the development of conflict within a large regional context, as we have seen in this chapter.

- ***A regional war with regional warriors?***

Hoffman notes that accounts of the wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, as well as the periods of violence in Guinea, often explore the influence of one conflict on another but that they are more rarely treated as *the same* war. Hoffman questions this. In his analysis of warfare in the Mano River region, he focuses on the seminal role that border-crossing and movement played in this context, referring to movements of personnel, war materiel, financing, plunder, refugees, tactics, ideas etc.¹⁵² And as Reno has pointed out in his analysis of the wider interstate political contexts of this (or *these*) wars, regional politics of personal alliance shaped

¹⁵¹ Themnér, 2011, p. 7.

¹⁵² Hoffman, 2011, p. 27.

what became more than just a fight to become the next Liberian president.¹⁵³ Whether warfare in the Mano River region should be seen as one or several intimately connected conflicts does not concern me here. However, in line with Hoffman's reasoning, this chapter is focused on how movements across the regional borders, with specific focus on combatants, affected the course of events and conflict development during this turbulent time. At the same time Reno's emphasis on the importance of regional personal-alliance politics, both at the highest political level as well as on grass-root level in the actual actions of the rebels, has been taken into account. By following individual Liberian combatants like Michael, Simon and Jacob and their networks of rebel soldiers I have shown how networks of combatants can easily be used in a wider context than their original theatre of conflict. I have illustrated how actors within the absolute top of the regional elite at this point in time, like Taylor, Conté and Kabbah, did their best to use these mobile networks of combatants for their own personal gains as well as against each other. I explore these dynamics, however, with a point of departure in, and the main emphasis on the experiences of combatants on the ground. My informants' stories nevertheless shed light on how even individual combatants could become important to these powerful actors, precisely because they were part of larger rebel network that in turn had the ability to change the course of conflict in the whole Mano River region. As Reno has pointed out, Taylor was a far more sophisticated strategist than most reports were willing to acknowledge. He was not only extremely bright; he was also a careful collector of data on people and events that he found important for his situation.¹⁵⁴ Jacob's personal encounter with Charles Taylor in 2002, I believe, not only supports Reno's statement about Taylor but could actually be seen as an example of how a powerful actor, even at the presidential level, felt the need for, or saw advantages of, using individual combatants in order to cause disturbance in, or manipulate, networks opposing him. This I would argue, is a good example of how such actors within the Mano River regional elite acknowledged these networks as valuable tools to be used in their own interest as well as significant threats if turned against them. This, I believe, also shows what tends to be forgotten: the elite is actually quite close to the combatants on the ground in a conflict like the Liberian one simply because they need to be well-connected to the actual fighters in order to control and influence the outcome of war.

¹⁵³ Reno, 2007, p. 70.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

These combatants, organised in often well-structured networks, were strong forces to be reckoned with, and the elite actors were fully aware of their potential.

Furthermore, when it comes to the frequency and actual occurrence of regional use and remobilisation of post-war rebel networks, Bøås and Dunn do recognise, in their edited volume on 'African guerrillas', the recycling of warriors from one place to another as an important aspect of civil war in Africa. However, they note that the concern that these recycled combatants can be used as seasoned mercenaries and further destabilise the region is somewhat exaggerated. While it is correct, they argue, that some fighters from Liberia have fought in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, these professional warriors constitute only a small minority of the total population of combatants in these countries as the overall majority of the fighters fought only in their own country.¹⁵⁵ That argument is not contested here. As already stated in this thesis, and as the following case studies will show, the most important aspects of why post-war rebel networks like those Michael, Simon and Jacob are all part of seldom have something to do with their will to take part in renewed warfare specifically. Nevertheless, rebel networks, like the ones followed in this chapter, *can* clearly be used across regional borders as these mobile warring networks, with elite level support, can easily be mobilised if the right channels are used. As Michael once told me, "You know Mariam, some people used to call us the Mano River Unit! Because we were fighting all over the place". Michael's story shows what rarely is accounted for: how such mobilisation and recruitment can actually be carried out in practice. Michael's story highlights the importance of individual commanders and how they can be used as entry points for efficiently and rapidly mobilising rebel networks. I would argue that no matter whether the recycling of rebel networks occur less frequently than is often assumed, it *does* happen, and we therefore need to learn more about such mechanisms and how individual combatants on the ground are tied to the most powerful mobilising actors within the elite. Furthermore, by following an actor like Michael in particular, the commonly held prejudice regarding African rebel movements as badly organised and undisciplined is challenged by the way the mobilising LURD made use of his skills and extensive rebel network. The LURD, at least initially, had an efficient and well-

¹⁵⁵ Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn, "African Guerrillas – Raging against the machine", Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007, p. 30.

structured way of mobilising and organising its troops, to a great extent consisting of Liberian post-war rebel networks with high-level Guinean support.

4. From rebels to security providers

Post-war rebel networks at the Sime Darby/ Guthrie Rubber Plantation

The events at the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, or Sime Darby as the Liberian plantation came to be known after January 2010, will be used in this chapter¹⁵⁶ to illustrate some of the mechanisms allowing rebel networks to linger long after the wars came to an end in Liberia and the neighbouring region. These events will attempt in particular to show how political and commercial interests, but also security concerns and disappointment in the DDRR process, have contributed to the maintenance of wartime structures at this location. The developments at the plantation, from the time of war up until the present, show how post-war rebel networks have actually continued to be of strategic importance for the ruling political elite in Liberia, despite the end of wars in West Africa and throughout a time when the Liberian authorities were officially part of international efforts aiming at demobilising and reintegrating such structures. But the situation at the plantation also shows how former key rebel commanders themselves have been able to strategically preserve and use their influence gained during the wars, not only during the initial period just after the peace agreement had been signed, but several years following the official break with war. Accordingly, the power dynamics at the plantation display an unofficial lingering mutual dependence between the political elite, commercial investors and the networks of ex-combatants, having clear implications on the post-war security context in Liberia, with the rebels being involved first as illegal occupiers, then as an unofficial informal security force, and finally as recognised formal security providers.

In this chapter we will also further scrutinise the meaning of security provision, as discussed in the introductory chapter. We will explore whether former rebels who have been the ultimate instruments of causing insecurity and perpetrating violence during years of war can instead become providers of security in the post-war phase. Or whether these networks

¹⁵⁶ Parts of this chapter are re-written versions of an earlier published book chapter; "Demobilized or Remobilized? Liberia's remaining rebel structures in post-war security settings", in Ed. Mats Utas, *African Conflicts and Informal Power – Big Men and Networks*, Zed. Books, 2012.

simply are used due to their violent potential, as a source of intimidation towards those who could question or disobey or otherwise pose a threat to the political and economic elite making use of these networks. Furthermore, this specific case will also illuminate how formal and informal security provision are intimately interlinked in a post-conflict country like Liberia while at the same time displaying the ex-combatants' striving to move from the informal sphere to the formal by gaining official status and recognition for their work as security providers.

Three individuals in particular will be the focus of this chapter, three former rebel generals, controlling networks of ex-combatants who had been present at the plantation for years. At times these former rebel generals have been in full control of all aspects of the management of the plantation, at other times they have been deeply involved in the elite's management of it. Two of these former generals we already know from previous chapter – Michael and Simon, the young combatants who navigated both the first and the second Liberian war and the West African crisis during the 1990s and early 2000 as soldiers and rebels, as mercenaries and regional warriors. These two experienced combatants, alongside another former rebel general Alpha¹⁵⁷, presented in this chapter, all came to play important roles in the preservation of post-war rebel networks at the plantation. In this chapter I aim to illustrate these three former generals' internal interactions, their coordination of their former fighters at the plantation and their interactions with the political and economic elite in Liberia, in order to explain the function and the logic behind these lingering post-war rebel networks.

The Guthrie Rubber Plantation and the civil wars – rebel networks fighting for control

In 1981 the Malaysian Guthrie Rubber Company was hired to operate a 300,000-acre government-owned plantation area, located in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount Counties of Liberia. Rubber is one of the main exports of Liberia, with the first plantation established as early as 1906, and with one of the world's largest rubber plantations, owned by Firestone Plantation Company, located in the country. The civil wars came to affect the situation at the

¹⁵⁷ In order to protect the identities of my informants Alpha's real name will not be used in this thesis.

country's rubber plantations, with several actors trying to get a share of the lucrative industry. Charles Taylor, as the new president of Liberia, installed an interim management in December 2000 to control Guthrie. The "new management" mainly comprised the same management as before but now the plantation was under the direct leadership of Taylor. But renewed warfare challenged Taylor's control over Guthrie. During 2002 and 2003, LURD rebels carried out several attacks in and around the plantation area, and by July 2003 the rebel takeover was a fact.¹⁵⁸ As the war came to an end, ex-combatants established full control and management over the Guthrie plantation, initially under the leadership of one ex-LURD general in particular: Simon.

In June 2006, three years after the signing of the Liberian peace agreement and LURD's takeover of Guthrie, an estimated 5,000 ex-combatants were still in full control of the rubber plantation area. The command structures were still intact, as the ex-combatants maintained allegiance to their former commanders. Rank determined control over rubber tapping. No one could operate at Guthrie without the permission of Simon, and taxes had to be paid to the self-established NGO, the National Veteran Rehabilitation Project (NVRP), which was run by a five-member committee of ex-combatants also controlled by the two ex-LURD generals. Control over Guthrie implied control over great economic interests. The NVRP was said to generate up to USD 18,000 a month, in addition to significant sums made by individual ex-combatant tappers. The ex-combatants themselves claimed that rubber tapping was their only means of survival while awaiting the RR component of the DDRR process to take effect.¹⁵⁹ In February 2006 President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) of UNMIL Alan Doss, established the Rubber Plantation Task Force (RPTF) in order to assess the situation of Liberia's rubber plantations and to make recommendations for future action.¹⁶⁰ The RPTF concluded that the illegal occupation of rubber plantations had to be stopped. The government were recommended to evaluate options for implementing reintegration and rehabilitation packages for registered ex-

¹⁵⁸ United Nations Mission in Liberia, "Human Right in Liberia's Rubber Plantations: Tapping into the Future", May 2006, p. 78.

¹⁵⁹ Global Witness, "Cautiously Optimistic: The Case for Maintaining Sanctions in Liberia", Global Witness Briefing Document, June 2006, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Joint Government of Liberia – United Nations "Rubber Plantations Task Force", May 2006, available at http://www.laborrights.org/files/Rubber_TF_Report.pdf, p. 1.

combatants at Guthrie in order to establish a government-run interim management at the plantation.¹⁶¹ President Johnson Sirleaf formally requested the RPTF to concentrate its efforts on re-establishing state authority and rule of law on the plantations occupied by ex-combatants or other illegal managements. Negotiations between the RPTF and the ex-combatant leadership followed. After promises of reintegration benefits for the ex-combatants, the government with UNMIL military and police support claimed to have repossessed Guthrie under an interim management team (IMT) on 15 August 2006. Following negotiations between the Liberian Government and the Malaysian palm-oil-producing company Sime Darby, an agreement was finally signed in April 2009.¹⁶² The takeover was delayed but Sime Darby finally took over the management of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation on January 1, 2010.

According to a UN report from October 2009, individual negotiations launched by the RPTF with ex-combatants helped to break down the ex-combatants' chains of command in order to repossess the Guthrie plantation in 2006.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, as will be shown in this chapter, chains of command and rebel networks were far from broken. Even though control officially once again lay in the hands of the Liberian government and the current IMT the former LURD generals were still influential, with their network of ex-combatants remaining active at the plantation long after this date.

Taking over Guthrie – the LURD generals and the rubber plantation¹⁶⁴

When war came to an end in Liberia, ex-combatants had to face a new type of challenge. Having survived war, they now needed to survive peace. Former rebels like Michael and Simon, for example, who had been drawn into the wars as young combatants, had first taken up arms with the need to find protection. Later, with few alternatives open to them, this had

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶² Andrea Tamagnini, Director of the Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR) Section, United Nations Mission in Liberia, "End-of-Assignment Report", 1 October, 2009.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁶⁴ This chapter has been written partly based on several interviews and conversations that I have had mainly with Michael, during September and October 2011 and during April 2012 in Monrovia, Liberia.

also become a way to secure a living. Michael and Simon, and whole networks of ex-combatants, could use their skills in warfare in different conflict contexts all over the West African region affected by war and crisis as long as political elite actors were willing to use them in their proxy wars and struggles for power. However, with the end of the wars, ex-combatants had to find new strategies to fight for survival in a war-torn Liberia. For Michael and Simon, whose war trajectories had often been entangled during the many years they had been combatants, post-war life came to offer quite different opportunities for them and their lives would eventually look very different. Yet, the situation at Guthrie after Taylor had fallen from power was to bring them together.

Michael and Simon had both been active in LURD during the second Liberian civil war. Yet, while Simon had been a general fighting on the ground, Michael instead had had a more strategic responsibility, mobilising combatants for the rebellion from different parts of West Africa. With this responsibility, Michael also had a more direct link to the rebel movement's leadership. This link, between the movement's highest level and combatants on the ground, opened up new opportunities when the peace negotiations eventually came about in 2003. Michael came to be part of the group of combatants representing LURD who travelled to Accra for the signing of the peace agreement. He had been assigned as a 'liaison officer' between the military and political factions of LURD. His task, Michael saw it, was to protect the interests of the LURD combatants and to see to it that the fighters were not left out of the process for subsequent reintegration benefits. The first DDR process in Liberia, following the first war, Michael argued, had completely left out the RR components for the combatants, and no real rehabilitation or reintegration had come out of the Abuja accord. Therefore, the ex-combatants, at least from the military wing, were determined to work for the rehabilitation and reintegration aspects to actually be emphasised after the 2003 peace accord. However, such a scenario, Michael argues, never materialised. This was the reason why the post-war rebel network of an estimated 5,000 ex-combatants, initially under Simon's command, who had managed to take control over the plantation in July 2003 stated that they had no interest in cooperating with the official Liberian DDRR process if they were not given sufficient reintegration benefits. "We decided to just use the government resources directly instead", Michael explains, to compensate for the benefits that they saw they were entitled to. And so

began the ex-combatants' illegal management of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, where they officially remained in control for the following three years.

Using rebel networks and manoeuvring political actors – the LURD generals' rule of Guthrie 2003-2006

Michael had initially no role in the ex-combatants' plantation occupation. He had left the battlefield, taken part in peace negotiations and was looking for new post-war opportunities. Simon, on the other hand, as a LURD general, had led the rebel attacks against the Taylor government in and around Guthrie in 2002 and 2003 resulting in the rebel takeover of the plantation in July 2003. Yet both men's fates, as during the days of war, were once again to be shaped by the political elite. With Charles Taylor in exile, new actors with a taste for power had stepped forward. The 2003 peace agreement called for the establishment of a National Transitional Government (NTGL), a government that was to be led by Gyude Bryant. Bryant, a Liberian businessman, had not been directly involved in the civil wars and was chosen for the powerful position because of his perceived neutrality. The NTGL was composed of a mix of representatives from the warring factions: LURD, MODEL and Taylor's NPFL. This was a coalition with one apparent focus: to enrich themselves during the two years they stayed in power. Their misdeeds were also later investigated by audits in the European Commission and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), revealing that corruption was rampant and the justice system in shambles. This led to arrests and a series of trials that nevertheless ended in acquittals on all charges relating to economic sabotage.¹⁶⁵ During the NTGL's time in power, undoubtedly in line with their quest to enrich themselves, the ex-combatants' takeover of Guthrie soon became an important issue for the transitional government, as the rubber industry at the plantation had the potential of generating significant economic resources for those in control of it. Bryant called for a meeting with the rebel leadership at Guthrie, but before he did so he contacted Michael. Bryant was well aware that Michael knew Simon and the other leaders occupying the plantation and probably figured that he could use Michael to his advantage in the negotiations. But what Bryant may not have calculated on was that Michael also saw this as a strategic opportunity. In their meeting,

¹⁶⁵ International Crisis Group, "Liberia: How Sustainable is the Recovery", Africa Report No 177, August, 2011, p. 1.

Michael realised what he had always known, that Simon was a skilled leader of men in battle but that he had no clue how to handle the political elite. Michael took his chance and decided to join the occupiers. He was welcomed by Simon and the rebel leadership, who probably understood the benefits of having a leader among them who had been able to establish links to the absolute elite of the Liberian political system. But Bryant “was a wise man”, Michael states when discussing his relation with Bryant after the meeting. As Bryant understood the importance of Guthrie and its resources, Michael recalls, he called on Michael and Simon to further discuss the situation at the plantation and to come to a solution. In Michael’s own words “we made him understand the situation” as they demanded reintegration programmes for their former fighters at Guthrie, which Bryant agreed to. Some 500 ex-combatants from Guthrie were thereby sent to Bong County to participate in an agricultural training programme. The leadership, Michael and Simon, were employed by the DDDR commission as facilitators of the reintegration of their former fighters in Bong. They were to make sure that the ex-combatants went through the process. However, in this way the two former commanders in practice also became the ‘gate-keepers’ to the benefits the ex-combatants at the plantation could get, further strengthening their positions. At the same time, Michael and Simon with their network of ex-combatants kept their positions at Guthrie, undoubtedly generating significant resources both for the rebels and the NTGL, as the whole question of control over the rubber plantation came to be postponed due to the upcoming 2005 Liberian national elections.

As the elections came and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became president in 2005, and while the international community celebrated the democratic developments in Liberia, “everything stayed the same at Guthrie”, Michael says. “Individuals changed, but the same institutions remained in control of Guthrie” he argues. After Johnson Sirleaf had been elected president, she – like Guyde Bryant before her – called for meetings with Michael and Simon. “Ellen was wise and decided to use the same formula as the NTGL had used”, Michael states. However, as described above, President Johnson Sirleaf and the UNMIL SRSG Alan Doss established the Rubber Plantation Task Force and called upon the re-establishment of state authority and rule of law on the plantations occupied by ex-combatants or other illegal management. Negotiations between the RPTF and the ex-combatant leadership followed, and, after

promises of reintegration benefits for the ex-combatants, Michael and Simon and their post-war rebel network officially handed over control of Guthrie to the government of Liberia, under an interim management team (IMT), in August 2006. As we shall see, in practice, the ex-combatants and the rebel leadership remained active and very influential at the plantation.

I would argue that the role that Michael and Simon and their post-war rebel network played at Guthrie rubber plantation should not be underestimated. For three years, from 2003 until 2006, Guthrie and the nearby villages were completely under their command. Such influence, during this relatively long period, would have been impossible if the commanders did not have the ability to satisfy, or to a certain extent coerce, dependants below and the elites above. Firstly, relaying on the former rebel structures and chains of command, the former rebel commanders could maintain control and loyalty by keeping lower-ranking former commanders in key position under their direct control. Furthermore, the post-war rebel networks' organisational structure went beyond LURD's former chains of command. Within their ex-combatant network at Guthrie, former rebels, as well as followers from NPFL and MODEL, were organised and fully integrated into the command structures. In this way, the commanders could avoid internal divisions and the combatants' previous factional associations never became a real issue at the plantation. Secondly, the rubber industry and Guthrie generated significant amounts of money. As mentioned above, Global Witness estimated that the commanders' ex-combatants organisation made up to USD 18,000 a month in addition to the money the individual ex-combatant tappers earned.¹⁶⁶ A large number of authorities, including top local and central officials of the transitional government, were known to receive bribes from the ex-combatants in order to ignore the situation at Guthrie.¹⁶⁷ And, as was revealed by Michael, the cooperation with the NTGL reached all the way to its chairman, Gyude Bryant. Since the former commanders had the ability to keep the plantation running while at the same time generating a significant income for many influential actors, the rebel leadership gained the crucial unofficial political support needed to remain in power. In the words of Simon himself, "I was the government, the management, everything. You see, I created a system that everybody was benefiting from. In that way I could keep the control,

¹⁶⁶ Global Witness, 2006, p.10.

¹⁶⁷ Tamagnini, 2009, p.17.

and everybody was satisfied.” Despite Simon’s choice of words, he and Michael exerted shared leadership. When I first started to research and map the ex-combatant networks and the informal security structures at Guthrie in 2009, I failed to see the full role of Michael. Simon, alongside a third commander, Alpha (who will be presented later in this chapter), were the visible ones. Michael was, nevertheless, the one that the three commanders themselves regarded as the highest in their hierarchy. Simon was notorious and feared. He was known to be dangerous and very violent, which explains his visibility. He was the one who most active on an operational level at the plantation during the time of the rebel occupation, but also in the period that followed, as he was incorporated into the informal security structures after the official governmental takeover in 2006. The dynamics between Michael and Simon are interesting to analyse in order to understand how they were able to maintain control of Guthrie between 2003 and 2006, and currently remain influential at the plantation. Michael and Simon’s relationship is undeniably close. They grew up together, fought together, and then managed to take full control over Guthrie together. Furthermore, even after the official reestablishment of government control of the plantation they stayed influential, as the structures of security providers, based on networks of ex-combatants, they had established more or less remained. While Simon was the one who became the most visible of the two commanders with regard to the informal security provision of ex-combatant networks that lingered after 2006, Michael was, and is, the one with the closest political connections. He is also the one who during the plantation occupation years, successfully negotiated with contemporary political and economic elites in Liberia. As the two former commanders have shared their leadership, they have been able to divide the tasks between them in mutually beneficial ways. While Michael has connected them to the political and financial elites in Liberia, Simon has had the operational responsibility and skills to organise the ex-combatants under them. I would argue that the loyalty between Michael and Simon and the combination of their different skills have made them a successful duo when it comes to making use of their post-war rebel networks and their connections to the ruling elite.

The informal security structures at Guthrie after the government takeover – The lingering influence of former rebel commanders

When I first conducted research at Guthrie in October 2009, men and women guarded the entrances to the rubber plantation day and night and kept record of all persons and vehicles entering the plantation. They were called ‘the monitors’ at the time, because that was what they were supposed to do; monitor, observe and report suspected illegal tapping without taking any action themselves. Those who entered Guthrie unauthorised or who were caught stealing rubber or tapping illegally were to be immediately handed over to the police. As I was told by several UN officials, the IMT, and the police during my stay at Guthrie, the monitors were not to be considered a security force. In reality the situation was much more complex.

During my stay at Guthrie in 2009, the workers and inhabitants at the plantation were once again under the management of a new IMT. The IMT was led by Boakai Sirleaf (at that point Deputy Minister of Agriculture and a relative to President Johnson Sirleaf), while awaiting the expected, but delayed, handover to Malaysian investors. Since the government’s takeover from the rebels in 2006, new IMTs had come and gone. They were often characterised by mismanagement and regularly failed to pay the workers, causing tensions and occasional violent demonstrations. Yet when it came to informal security provision some structures appeared to have lingered. The current monitors had only worked for the new IMT for a couple of days in early October. This was not a new constellation. The IMTs all needed to protect their interests at Guthrie, and apparently the small unarmed and under-resourced police force, the monitoring UN police force and the present UN peacekeepers were not regarded as fulfilling this task satisfactorily. Already during Taylor’s time in power he had brought in ex-combatants to attend to the security at Guthrie, and the IMTs had chosen to take the same action following the government’s takeover. A significant part of the monitors had always been ex-combatants, operating within former rebel structures.

In 2009, Guthrie rubber plantation was divided into three estates: Grand Cape Mount Estate, Lofa Estate and Bomi Estate, which is subdivided into two sections, Bomi 1 and Bomi 2. Each

estate was then further divided into divisions and camps where the inhabitants lived and worked. The monitors numbered nearly 160 altogether, including three women. They lived and worked in all sections of the plantation and were organised somewhat like a military unit. Each estate had one commander (in total four commanders), which in turn had responsibility for the lower-ranking monitors. The estate commanders were all accountable to three main commanders, the first commander and his two deputies.¹⁶⁸ Another man also appeared to still be influential: the ex-LURD general we know as Simon, who together with Michael had officially handed over the control of Guthrie three years earlier in 2006.

The monitors were not all ex-combatants; indeed, many were not. Yet ex-combatants were present in every monitoring group at Guthrie. The constellation was not a new one. Many had been working as monitors for years. Some had been working since the government takeover in 2006 and for several different IMTs. Others had been there since the war or even before it. The current IMT had simply kept most of the monitors. On UNMIL's advice, the IMT was said to have excluded the most notorious ex-combatants. However, this was evidently not entirely true, as the presence and influence of two men in particular, the former commanders Simon and Alpha, proved otherwise.

Alpha – the former NPFL general¹⁶⁹

Alpha first came to Guthrie in 1998. The civil war was over, and Charles Taylor had become the new Liberian President. In order to protect and monitor every aspect of Liberia's financial resources, President Taylor also assumed direct control over Guthrie and the interim management. To secure the area against illegal tappers and rubber thieves, then as now, a security force was installed. The security providers were called the Plantation Protection Department, or simply the PPD. Alpha, a former NPFL general, was directly installed by Taylor

¹⁶⁸ I have chosen not to present the three main commanders of 'the Monitors' by name. However, one the two main deputies, will hereafter be referred to as *Alpha*.

¹⁶⁹ This section has been written partly based on several conversations that I mainly had with Alpha during October 2009 and September 2011, Bong County, Liberia.

as head of the PPD with the title of Chief of Security. Alpha remained in this position until the Taylor regime left power in 2003.

At the age of twenty, in 1990, Alpha had joined Taylor and the NPFL rebels. After three years with Taylor's forces, Alpha had advanced within the ranks of the NPFL and became a general. However, despite his new status, Alpha was still outranked by his twin brother,¹⁷⁰ a well-known NPFL general who had eventually been executed after orders by Taylor in 1994. The twin brothers gained a reputation early on in the war. A former PPD member, who worked at Guthrie under the command of Alpha for a year described the twin brothers as "really notorious and well-known. Those who have lived beyond the NPFL lines during the war know them. Alpha's twin brother was one of the NPFL generals and a close friend to Charles Taylor, and therefore Taylor chose Alpha as head of the PPD. But I think it was mostly because he was so notorious. You know, that was needed to keep the security at Guthrie. When you saw him you wouldn't believe what he was capable of doing. Alpha could be very violent."¹⁷¹ Even though Taylor had been the one who had appointed Alpha directly for the position at Guthrie, Alpha found it hard to trust the leadership of NPFL after his brother had been executed by their own forces. He heard rumours that Taylor had learnt that Alpha was only awaiting to avenge his brother's death, and therefore Taylor was after his life. Nevertheless, Alpha stayed at the plantation until July 2003 when he decided to go into exile in Ghana, as LURD forces, under the leadership of Simon, took over the rubber plantation. However, as the Liberian government regained control over Guthrie in 2006, Alpha saw new opportunities to return to the plantation. According to UNMIL officials that I spoke to in 2009, Alpha was one ex-combatant they surely did not want to see at the plantation, since they said he was known to cause trouble and harass workers and inhabitants at the plantation. In October 2009, Alpha was nevertheless the deputy commander of the monitors. He himself claims that he had returned to Guthrie only after having been called upon by the former interim management to provide security, in the same way he had done before. As I spoke to workers at the plantation

¹⁷⁰ The twin brother of Alpha and also a NPFL general had been one among the top commanders of the NPFL, which included Taylor's Gbaranga "Executive Mansion Commander" Cassius Jacobs, who Taylor in fear of internal competition ordered to be executed in 1994.

¹⁷¹ Conversation with a former PPD member, Monrovia, Liberia, October 2009.

in 2009, some told me that Alpha was power-greedy and corrupt, others that they respected him as their leader. Alpha's influence and authority was never questioned.

Simon – returning to Guthrie

In early October 2009, I heard a rumour among the plantation workers: Simon was back at Guthrie. He had been seen in several camps and the atmosphere became immediately tense when the matter of the former rebel general was brought up. That Simon was present at Guthrie once again was clear but not many knew why he was there, and this caused worry and distress among the workers. Yet the monitors were better informed than the regular tappers. One of the young monitors told me that Simon had come to their headquarters a few days earlier and said that he was now responsible for security at Guthrie and that the monitors once again were under his command. The monitor, however, had not confirmed this information with his monitor commanders. When I discussed the return of Simon with one of the plantation workers' supervisors, he not only confirmed the rumour but he also claimed that the very person who had brought Simon back was in fact the head of the new IMT, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture at the time, Boakai Sirleaf. The supervisor was not surprised at all by Sirleaf's actions. Simon possessed the ability to make tappers and monitors obey, either out of fear or respect. With Simon on his side, Sirleaf could control Guthrie. According to the supervisor, Simon had already started to reassume his commanding position as he supervised the plantation at night time, driving around the camps in one of the estate manager's car, and he knew of at least one recent incident where Simon had threatened a plantation worker suspected of illegal tapping. Sirleaf's relationship with Simon was, at least at Guthrie, not a well-kept secret since the monitors as well as the LNP commanders and the stationed UNMIL soldiers confirmed seeing them together. According to one of the stationed UNMIL soldiers at Guthrie, Sirleaf had said that Simon had been brought back to offer him advice on which ex-combatants were trustworthy, and that Simon thereby should be included in the new security structures for Guthrie. This, he said, had caused deep tensions among the workers at the plantation who feared the return of the ex-combatant leadership. Sirleaf himself denied that Simon had, or was to have, anything to do with the security provision at Guthrie when I had the opportunity to ask him about this matter. He claimed that the only reason he had brought

Simon back to the rubber plantation was so that the workers could see a good example of an ex-combatant who was now a fully reintegrated man.¹⁷²

The first time I met with Simon was in mid-October 2009 in Monrovia. We had talked on the phone a few times and had arranged a place to meet. Simon, however, did not turn up alone. He came accompanied by those he called his “boys”, a couple of ex-combatants he always kept around him for his security, in the same way he had always organised his personal protection during the wars and when he controlled Guthrie. The ex-combatants in his network were not all former LURD fighters. His ability to unite the ex-combatants irrespective of their previous allegiances during his years at Guthrie was still prevalent as some of his closest “boys” came from other warring factions. Since a couple of weeks back, Simon and his boys had once again been active at Guthrie. He had returned because he was requested to do so he said. In September, when the new IMT claimed responsibility of Guthrie, Boakai Sirleaf had called Simon, telling him that the Liberian government needed him to secure peace at the plantation. Otherwise they risked new protests among the plantation workers, he was told. Since then, Simon had travelled back and forth to Guthrie, showing his support for the new IMT by “encouraging” tappers and monitors to remain loyal to the new management. According to Simon himself, his new position in no way implied that he was inferior to the monitor commanders; instead he claimed that they once again were under his command. Simon reported directly to Boakai Sirleaf. However, he was not the only one Simon reported to. As we talked, Simon’s phone rang and, according to him, Fombah Sirleaf – the stepson of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the director of the government agency National Security Agency – was the one who had called to request a meeting, wanting the latest report on the situation at Guthrie.

As I met with Michael and Simon in 2011 we discussed the developments after the government had taken over their leadership at Guthrie in 2006 and the events leading up to Simon’s unofficial return to the plantation in 2009. Michael described what happened after

¹⁷² Interview with Boakai Sirleaf, Guthrie Rubber Plantation, October 2009.

the government took over as a “leadership vacuum”. The IMTs were unable to control the ex-combatants and the tappers at the plantation, and several violent protests were staged against the new leadership. Boakai Sirleaf, as head of the new IMT at Guthrie in 2009 therefore felt the need to do something. He then turned to both Michael and Simon to ask them to return. He wanted them to talk to the ex-combatants and the other workers at the plantation and encourage them to work (as the situation was, the IMT had often failed to pay the tappers their monthly salary, resulting in violent protests and strikes). As Michael, who once again had used his skills to manoeuvre the post-war political climate and found new opportunities, was too busy to attend to the situation at Guthrie, the two former commanders decided that Simon would be the one who would return to Guthrie, keeping Michael fully informed about the situation.

Knowing the history of the rebel leadership at Guthrie, the new management must have assessed the risk of bringing the commanders back within the informal security structures at the plantation. According to Michael, this was also why the NSA and Foubah Sirleaf got involved. They knew that Simon had the ability to take control over Guthrie, and they feared yet another rebel occupation. But in this way, the government could use Simon’s reputation of being violent to make tappers work, despite their difficulties in providing the workers with regular salaries, while at the same time supervising him by keeping him close to the NSA in order to minimise the risks of the rebel leadership regaining control over the rubber plantation. Despite these measures, the cooperation with the former rebel generals was far from uncomplicated for the plantation management. Not only did Simon’s return to Guthrie cause distress and fear among the plantation workers. The two commanders also soon fell into disagreements with the management. As Michael explained about the situation at Guthrie, “we wanted to run our own kind of operation”. The two commanders considered that since they had been responsible for security at Guthrie for years, they were not interested in taking orders from the new management about how security was to be run. The disagreement however, never turned into an attempt at another rebel occupation. Instead, the dispute between the former rebels and the new management resulted in Simon leaving his unofficial position within the security force in December 2009.

Security provision at Sime Darby – New management, same lingering rebel networks¹⁷³

In January 2010, the Malaysian palm-oil producer Sime Darby had taken over the management of the former rubber plantation, and in September 2011, I travelled back to the plantation. In one of the nearby villages at the outskirts of the plantation I was to meet with Alpha, the former NPFL general who had been one of the commanders responsible for the plantation's informal security provision. As I came to learn, some things had changed when it came to the structures for security provision at the plantation with the new management. However, much had also stayed the same. 'The monitors' who now operated under the name of Sime Darby Security Force (SDS) had become the formal security providers for the new management. The members proudly presented their ID cards, showing me their new formal status. The group had expanded and was composed at this point by a little more than 200 security providers, approximately ten per cent of whom were women. The SDS had kept most of their former organisation structures, and the wartime rebel links were still visible, as about seventy-five percent of the security providers were ex-combatants from all factions active in the Liberian civil wars. Five main commanders were responsible for the different plantation estates, each having sub-commanders for the smaller divisions of the plantation. Alpha had risen to the highest security commander and had chosen the men and women who worked under him personally. He had known many of them during the war, as they had fought under him during his time as a NPFL general. Former fighters often came looking for him, knowing he now had the potential to provide them with paid employment by recommending them to the management.

Since the security group gained its official status and the Sime Darby management took over, Alpha and the security providers, as well as the other workers, had been paid without delay every month. This reflected a new kind of stability that had never been seen at the plantation during the Guthrie days. This development had, of course, brought with it several positive aspects, and one was that it thereby reduced the incentives of the ex-combatants to be used

¹⁷³ This section is based on fieldwork in and around the plantation area and interviews and personal communication with Alpha and other plantation workers in Bong County, Liberia, in September 2011.

as threats of violence against other plantation workers. Alpha had thereby also strengthened his own position in the community around the plantation. Tappers and other plantation workers did not need to fear the ex-combatants in the same way any longer, and the men under his command could be assured that work within the security force also would provide them with an income. Alpha was proud to show me around in his new house under construction, and he told me about his plans to start a new business on the side. He was thinking of starting a small nightclub, using a part of his house. His house and such plans would have been completely impossible only a few years earlier. But in his new position, Alpha was empowered. In this way, Alpha retained his network of ex-combatants, which the new management, like their predecessors before them, made good use of. However, despite the improved situation for the security providers, it should be noted that among the workers at the plantation, the security force had always been the prioritised ones when it came to the payment of salaries. As one of the security providers explained, the former management, despite failing to pay the tappers, always saw to it that at least the security group received some payment. In this way the government could secure their incomes generated from the plantation, as the security group could be used to make tappers work even when their salaries were delayed. According to this security provider, the group did not use violent measures against the workers, since many of the tappers and the other workers came from their own families and communities. But, as he explains, the security force was still able to ‘encourage’ the tappers to work simply due to the fact that many of them were ex-combatants. As he said, “the people had fear for us” but it is always like this: “if you’re in security you become the public enemy in Liberia. That is how people see it”. He then stated that Liberians have good reasons for this perception, considering the history of the country and how the people have always been abused by the security institutions.¹⁷⁴

When it came to the actual protection of Sime Darby, not much had changed since the first time I visited the plantation. The SDS carried out security in the same way they always had done. They guarded the entrances to the plantation and patrolled the area day and night, reporting all events to their immediate commanders. They were still unarmed, but the new

¹⁷⁴ Personal communication with a SDS member, Bong County, Liberia, September 2011.

management had provided them with cutlasses. For personal security, the group members stated. The area they patrolled was vast and, with only little more than 200 security guards, there were often not more than two or three individuals in each patrolling group, and sometimes they were forced to work alone. Several incidents of violent attacks had occurred, as rubber thieves and illegal tappers often operated in larger groups, outnumbering the small patrolling teams. The LNP only had a few unarmed officers in the area, and the UNMIL force at the plantation before the new management took over had left, leaving the SDS as one of the few security actors operating in the plantation area and the surrounding villages. The management had promised security training courses and uniforms for the members, but at this point the only thing that reflected the group's official status was the ID cards. Instead, it was very prominent that the group, for better and for worse and for lack of other means, still used their wartime skills and chains of command to organise and operate at the plantation.

Conclusion

The developments at Guthrie/Sime Darby plantation, from the time of Charles Taylor's regime at the end of the first civil war, throughout the years renewed warfare, post-conflict and pre-election period, reveal some of the reasons for why post-war rebel networks remain relevant in Liberia today. Regardless of the fact that many years have passed since the signing of the peace agreement. What we have seen in this case is that, paradoxically, the networks of former rebel structures that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf officially set out to disrupt were the very same that she and the Liberian government were using unofficially in order to maintain control and stay in power. The case of the ex-combatants at the plantation, I suggest, gives us insights into why the continued presence of war-time structures, in the shape of post-war rebel networks, can become so important from a political and economic perspective, both for the individual ex-combatants, for lack of other livelihood opportunities, and the elite, looking to secure power and ensure financial gains. Through the analysis of this mutual interdependence, between the political and economic elite, on the one hand, and the ex-combatants, on the other, the links between formal and informal regimes of power shaping the contemporary security situation in Liberia also become visible. By looking at the case of Guthrie/Sime Darby from the perspective of the political elite, it appears that it simply was

never the true intention to completely demobilise all former rebel structures. Post-war rebel networks were much too valuable mobilised for such an undertaking. In the words of Jörgel and Utas, politicians are Big Men with powers only as great as their networks. Party politics thereby can be seen as a form of patronage, whereby politicians obtain “wealth in people” in exchange for assuming responsibility for their followers.¹⁷⁵ The logical thing to do from such a perspective could therefore instead be argued to do as much as possible to preserve, rather than to break, such useful networks despite them being created out of warfare.

- ***Ex-combatants in the post-war political economy***

As the case demonstrates, there are clearly not only political reasons for the elite’s use of post-war rebel networks at the plantation. The potential of substantial economic gains was one important part of this development. As Berdal and Zaum have argued, war, and civil war in particular, transforms the relationship between state and market, creating its own political economy. Because of war, new structures of political power and authority can arise; new actors controlling resources can emerge; and new forms of interaction between political and economic life can come about. Civil war implies the emergence of different, or alternative, kinds of order. And as Berdal and Zaum conclude, war economies persist into peacetime and are likely to shape the character of the post-war political economy.¹⁷⁶ I would argue that such a development has clearly occurred in Liberia, and that the case of Guthrie/Sime Darby is an illustrative example of this. Several actors have been used to, or even dependent on, the wartime logic upon which the economy of this plantation has been built, making it rather difficult, or even undesirable, to change the way things are despite the established peace.

Furthermore, in the specific Liberian case, Reno – in his analysis of the warfare in Liberia, and what he calls “warlord politics” – finds that the Liberian war did follow a clear logic. Strongmen used commerce to consolidate their political power within a coalition of interest among

¹⁷⁵ Magnus Jörgel and Mats Utas, “The Mano River Basin Area: Formal and Informal Security Providers in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone”, Swedish Defence Research Agency, *Defence Analysis*, 2007, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷⁶ Mats Berdal and Dominik Zaum, *Political Economy of Statebuilding – Power after peace*, Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding, 2013, pp. 4-5.

themselves, businessmen, and local fighters. Taylor, he notes, controlled commerce in gold and diamond mining, timber and, as we have seen in this case study, rubber. Such warlord politics, Reno argues, is not a result of the collapse of state authority and capacity. Instead this situation emerged as the result of a social coalition of enterprising strongmen, small-scale foreign commercial operators and a segment of the country's youth. The history of governance in Liberia and the elite's social arrangements, along with external conditions, have given strongmen the political and financial autonomy to seek their own fortunes at the expense of a central authority.¹⁷⁷ I would suggest that even though the wars were over, many aspects of this old logic referred to by Reno remained the same in post-war Liberia, despite the absence of warlords in presidential positions. Thus, the Liberian government under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, just like the governments led by Bryant and Taylor preceding it, rather than demobilising all ex-combatants – which is the entire point with the DDDR process – had strong reasons for remobilising influential ex-combatants. This appears to have been done out of both political and financial considerations as well as from a security point of view. The plantation has always had the potential of generating a significant income for the Liberian state. Yet during the time the plantation was under the government's management they were unable to provide employment and basic social services for their workers. Therefore, as we have seen, protests and strikes were a constant threat to the government's authority. In this context, the influence of notorious ex-combatants was used in order to make people work. Considering Liberia's violent past and history of attaining power by war or coups, the efficiency of this strategy should not be underestimated. However, ex-combatants are per definition potential de-stabilisers; as they once were the instruments of warfare, they could just as well become so again. By unofficially using the violent potential of the ex-combatants, President Johnson Sirleaf and the ruling political elite could, on the one hand, secure their political and economic interests in order to remain in power, but, on the other hand, they were at risk of maintaining structures that could be used for renewed warfare.

¹⁷⁷ William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp.79-80.

- ***Post-war transformation of rebels into security providers?***

When the rebels took over the plantation in 2003 it was clearly nothing but an illegal occupation. Still, the official transitional government cooperated with the rebel management and benefited from the illicit economy generated at Guthrie. Later, when the Liberian government under the leadership of President Johnson Sirleaf regained control of the plantation, many aspects of informal structures, like the remaining post-war rebel structures, stayed the same and actually ensured that Guthrie kept generating financial resources despite the inadequate management. The plantation in this sense, after the government takeover, still operated in the borderlands between the formal and informal, and the legal and illicit. Carolyn Nordstrom, in her research on “shadow networks” – that is, extra-state exchange systems in and in relation to war – and on how economic transactions take place on non-legal platforms as well as the shadowy il/legalities that sustain war, finds that there is a profound irony in such shadow realities. Nordstrom notes that the realm of the unregulated is a realm of both possibilities, where great fortunes can be made, as well as a realm of danger, where great cruelty is possible. The arena of the shadows, she argues, is a place where power regimes are contested and where new forms of capital, access and authority arise. Shadow networks are not merely illicit systems bent on rapid and potentially immense gain, but also offer a means of development for people with few alternative means of survival, making shadow regimes a serious source of power in the contemporary world.¹⁷⁸ When it comes to the unofficial use of post-war rebel networks at Guthrie/Sime Darby, I believe that one must also keep in mind this notion pointed out by Nordstrom. There is no doubt that the ex-combatants in this case study were used in a manner that involved clear risks and had severe unethical implications. They caused fear and were potential sources of violence in and around the plantation area. But they did so mainly when the elite called for it. This was evident as the situation was much calmer after the Sime Darby management took over. The incentives of violent and threatening behaviour against the plantation workers were clearly reduced by this change of management, since the elite no longer had any need to use ex-combatants as intimidators against their own workers, as they were now able to pay salaries and provide better working conditions. The overall question I pose in this thesis is whether a rebel can

¹⁷⁸ Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War – Violence, power and international profiteering in the twenty-first century*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 211.

become a security provider or, in other words, if a perpetrator can become a protector, and the answer is of course yes. But it all comes down to the elite actors' intentions when using post-war rebel networks, no matter whether the use is informal or formal, official or hidden. These networks do have a violent potential but also a potential for providing good security, being well-organised and disciplined. They are not simply good or bad in themselves.

The transformation of the security providers at the plantation from times of war, rebel occupation and post-war interim managements until the Sime Darby management took over also reflects this interaction and the dynamics between formal and informal security provision. The trajectory of Alpha is interesting in this regard, as he has been active at the plantation since the time of Charles Taylor, with only a few years' interruption. Alpha, along with many men under him, have gone from being rebel soldiers to becoming informal security providers and have now finally reached a state where they can call themselves the official security force of the plantation. Their transformation, while operating at the borders between the official and unofficial, shows how the ex-combatants have strived to find employment opportunities in an insecure post-war environment through the use of their wartime networks and skills. In this sense they have also succeeded, as they have finally found a position within the formal security system. This due to the fact that the economic and political elite, in times of war as well as of post-war, and regardless of who has been in power, has taken advantage of these post-war rebel networks, despite the risks and perils of keeping them mobilised. The work as security providers, both informally and formally, at the plantation after the government had regained control in fact also gave ex-combatants, who often struggle to make a living in post-war situations, something to do and a way to support themselves. Giving ex-combatants a chance to survive on other activities than warfare does work as a conflict-management effort, even in settings where their links to each other are preserved.

Furthermore, in order to understand in-depth how post-war rebel networks operate and how the elite make use of such structures in practice, one needs to follow and focus on individuals within these networks. The three commanders, the former rebel generals Michael, Simon and Alpha, presented in this chapter, represent important nodes, linking formal and informal regimes of power by connecting the political elite to their networks of former rebel soldiers,

networks, as we have seen, with the ability to both create security and cause instability. The Liberian political elite's interaction with these former generals, as illustrated by the case of Guthrie/Sime Darby gives evidence of the elite's strategy to win the loyalty of the ex-combatants through key former rebel commanders who still have influence over their wartime networks and, as in this example, mainly use them for financial gains. For the individual ex-combatants, they can link themselves to the formal regimes of power within post-war rebel networks and through their former, or new-found, rebel commanders in the hope of finding employment opportunities or economic gains in a way that would never have been possible otherwise. Michael in particular is a good example of an actor who has been able to benefit from this mutual dependence between the political and economic elite and the ex-combatants. By keeping his network of ex-combatants close to him, even after he and Simon had handed over control of the plantation, he remained important for the political elite a 'gate-keeper' to these lingering war structures, which politicians and others in power wish to use. Michael also managed to use the contacts he gained during his time managing the plantation in order to secure employment within the official security structures of Liberia, through a position with the Intelligence Department of the LNP. And as we shall see in the following chapter, Michael has continued to climb the hierarchies of the formal state security system, using his good connections to the elite and his post-war rebel network. In addition to that, Michael has done what few ex-combatants have had the ability to do: he has invested some of his resources in university studies in order to obtain a degree in Criminal Justice. While using his skills and contacts, Michael has continued to pursue a post-war security career and has attained a senior position within one of Liberia's formal security institutions. At the same time, in addition to running an ex-combatant organisation, Michael and Simon continued to visit the plantation, the new Sime Darby management and the headquarters of the ex-combatants within the plantation security group led by Alpha several times a week. Michael was thereby safeguarding his interests and influence through his position within both the formal and informal power structures of Liberia.

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to show that the maintenance of post-war rebel networks and the actual use of such structures is quite a complex issue. Post-war rebel networks can, and are, used for both good and bad, and can be both providers of security or violent perpetrators. In this chapter, the elites' initial use of remaining wartime structures of

ex-combatants appears to have been well connected to these actors' violent potential. In this case post-war rebel networks were undoubtedly used due to the fact that they can have a very intimidating effect on their surroundings. Ex-combatants were used to make workers do their share even when the management itself has failed to fulfil its end of the deal of paying salaries on time or providing good working conditions. Nevertheless, post-war rebel networks are at the same time also used because ex-combatants connected to such structures can be good workers: disciplined and already well-organised. Although the plantation occupation was an illegal venture, networks of ex-combatants also had the ability to turn their military organisation into a structure managing all aspects of this Liberian rubber plantation. The later use of post-war rebel networks at the plantation, as Sime Darby had taken over the management and working conditions in general had become more stabilised, appears to be more connected to the fact that the former rebels could actually become well-organised security providers if used for this specific purpose.

5. The winner takes it all

Political use of post-war rebel networks in the 2011 Liberian elections

In October 2011, Liberia faced one of the country's toughest post-war challenges – the second general and presidential elections following the civil war. These were the first post-war elections organised by the Liberians themselves. The previous elections had been run by the UN peacekeeping mission; now the Liberian state took over. The elections were widely seen as a test of the state of the country's security-political situation, and as an opportunity to consolidate Liberia's fragile peace. Yet there was also a fear of renewed instability, or even violence. The elections would be telling, not only in terms of the final electoral results. More importantly, the pre-election political mobilisation and the manner in which the elections were conducted would, it was thought, be a powerful gauge of Liberia's security system and how far the country had come since the peace agreement. In most post-conflict countries much is at stake, and tensions are high during elections.¹⁷⁹ The 2011 Liberian elections were no exception. In this chapter I will use the elections as a point of departure for analysing the contemporary role of Liberian ex-combatants, and how such a political event can highlight the relevance of talking about 'post-war rebel networks', eight years after the war came to an end.

The use of wartime structures and ex-combatants in order to win elections is not a new phenomenon in Liberia. As Terrence Lyons, amongst others, observed during the 1997 elections after the first civil war, the former NPFL rebel leader Charles Taylor converted his military organisation into an efficient mass-mobilising political party where patronage replaced guns and rallies roadblocks, in order to win the political competition.¹⁸⁰ Taylor's political party – National Patriotic Party (NPP) – provided a civilian platform from where he

¹⁷⁹ For a more detailed discussion on the challenges and insecurities during post-conflict elections see for example; Terrence Lyons, *Demilitarizing Politics: Elections and the Uncertain Road to Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, Cyril Obi, "Introduction: Elections and the Challenge of Post-Conflict Democratisation in West Africa", in *African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1&2, 2007 and Harris, David, *Civil War and Democracy in West Africa: Conflict Resolution, Elections and Justice in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, I.B.Tauris, 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Terrence Lyons, "Liberia's Path from Anarchy to Elections", *Current History*, 97:619, 22-233, 1998, p. 232.

could compete for votes during the elections but in reality the organisation remained fundamentally militarised.¹⁸¹ Taylor then convinced UN monitors to accept the result of the elections, in which his NPFL had intimidated voters, and he was elected president.¹⁸² As noted by Benjamin Reilly, the easiest way to attract voters in post-conflict societies is often to appeal to the very same insecurities that generated the original conflict in the first place. In such cases, Reilly argues, instead of attempting to win support with policy appeals, post-conflict parties have a strong incentive to downplay policy choices and instead mobilise voters along identity lines.¹⁸³ In the Liberian case this seems to be true, as wartime insecurities as well as aspects of identity appear to have played an important role in all post-conflict elections. It should be noted, however, that a remarkable aspect of the 2005 elections was the virtually complete disappearance of rebel groups in the political process, as neither LURD nor MODEL transformed into political parties. Sekou Conneh, the former chairman of LURD, did reappear in the elections as a presidential candidate of his own political party, but the attempt was rather ineffectual as his estranged wife and former co-leader Aisha Conneh decided to support Johnson Sirleaf and the Unity Party (UP) instead.¹⁸⁴

According to David Harris many rebel generals and leaders of insurgent forces seemed to have been satisfied with unseating Taylor and pursuing lucrative deals within the transitional government NTGL and in business.¹⁸⁵ Still, the war and former rebel soldiers continued to have a significant impact on the elections also after the peace agreement had been signed in 2003. As demonstrated by Amos Sawyer, the ending of the war and the removal of the oligarchy and warlords did not make Liberia a political *tabula rasa*.¹⁸⁶ During the 2005 elections, as noted by Sawyer, the candidates who could claim to have provided security for local people during the wars were favoured by the voters. Candidates associated with armed groups with credible

¹⁸¹ Terrence Lyons, *Demilitarizing Politics: Elections and the Uncertain Road to Peace*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005, p. 131.

¹⁸² William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa: New Approaches to African History*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 20.

¹⁸³ Benjamin Reilly, "Elections and post-conflict political development", in Ed. Berdal, Mats and Dominik Zaum, *Political Economy of Statebuilding – Power after peace*, Routledge, 2013, p. 43.

¹⁸⁴ David Harris, *Civil War and Democracy in West Africa – Conflict resolution, elections and justice in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, I.B.Tauris, 2012, p. 161.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Amos Sawyer, "Emerging Patterns in Liberia's Post-Conflict Politics: Observations from the 2005 Elections", *African Affairs*, 107/427, 177-199, 2008, p. 199.

records among their people were elected. In Nimba County both elected senators had a past as combatants. Prince Johnson, the former leader of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), who constantly reminded voters of his protection of them during the conflict and his ability to defend them again should there be another war, won the senior senate seat by a landslide. The NPFL commander Adolphus Dolo,¹⁸⁷ who won the second senator seat, campaigned on his record of defending Nimba County against the LURD forces in 2001. Additionally, Sawyer noted that a similar pattern, although to a lesser extent, could also be seen in other parts of the country during the elections.¹⁸⁸

The 2011 Liberian elections came to provide yet another evidence of the long-term effects of the war and of remaining rebel structures still used for political purposes, despite all initiatives for demobilisation and reintegration. It revealed how important it is for many ex-combatants to become what they regard as 'politically active' but more so, it highlighted the importance of supporting the 'right' political candidate – to wit, the next president of Liberia. While the elections can be advantageous for ex-combatants, giving loyalty to the losing candidate can instead be devastating.

For this chapter¹⁸⁹ I have followed ex-combatants in support of the presidential candidates who, ultimately, were the most important candidates to the 2011 Liberian elections: the incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf from the Unity Party (UP) and Winston Tubman, presidential candidate from the Congress of Democratic Change (CDC), before, during and after the elections. The Liberian presidential elections will serve to illustrate both how the political elite used post-war rebel networks for different purposes, including informal security provision and voter mobilisation, as well as how the ex-combatants themselves made use of this political event and their wartime links to each other. My analysis takes the experiences of two men in particular as a point of departure, two Liberian men closely connected to ex-combatant networks. The first one, Michael, we know from the two previous chapters as the

¹⁸⁷ Adolphus Dolo was also known as General Peanut Butter during the war.

¹⁸⁸ Sawyer, 2008, p. 195.

¹⁸⁹ This chapter was written based on several interviews and personal conversations, predominately with Alex and Michael during periods of fieldwork between 2009 and 2012.

former rebel commander who, through his involvement in the illegal occupation of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, managed to secure important political connections leading all the way up to the incumbent president, Johnson Sirleaf. The other main protagonist, Alex¹⁹⁰, a former vigilante leader who, despite not having been a rebel soldier himself, managed to establish a network mainly of ex-combatants that was later mobilised by Winston Tubman during his electoral campaign. These two men's stories are very different, mainly due to the fact that Johnson Sirleaf won and Tubman lost the elections. For these men and especially to the ex-combatants around them, who had few opportunities to make a living in a post-war society, the elections were crucial. These political events are the moments when the otherwise distant political elite will have to listen to the Liberian people. During elections Liberians, and perhaps ex-combatants in particular, will see opportunities that are closed to them otherwise. But the difference between winning and losing in Liberia can be immense, something that can be demonstrated by following networks on both sides of the dividing line. For my informants, political involvement was very advantageous, for one side – for the other, disastrous.

Post-conflict elections – the final break with war?

Elections in post-conflict countries are often seen as important markers of a state's transition from war to peace. Elections are therefore prioritised within international efforts aiming at rebuilding states and promoting democracy after violent conflicts. Especially in high-profile international interventions, elections also have an important symbolic value, signalling in both the domestic and the international arena that a legitimate government authority has been put in place. This is seen as representing an essential step in the process of state reconstruction, and thus a central part of post-conflict state-building.¹⁹¹ Successful elections, that is, elections that are peacefully conducted and considered 'free and fair', become milestones symbolising a break with a violent wartime history. Yet, when electoral violence still occurs it naturally makes us question the sustainability of the newly acquired peace and the state of the democratisation process in general. Electoral violence, its causes, perpetrators and

¹⁹⁰ In order to protect the identity of my informants Alex' real name will not be used in this thesis.

¹⁹¹ Reilly, 2013, p. 33.

consequences, has been given increased attention for these reasons in recent years.¹⁹² Such research is of great value, not least because it can tell us something about the level of stability that a country has reached after a conflict. But would that then lead to the conclusion that the absence of electoral violence is a sign of a state's final break with war? In this chapter I suggest otherwise. Mary Moran, in her research on violence and democracy in Liberia, notes the western tendency to view these two concepts as opposite ends of an evolutionary scale whereby the successor to widespread violence is imagined to be democracy. Through the lens of the particular case of Liberia, Moran questions whether democracy and violence really are separate, or even separable, states or whether there is violence in democracy and democracy in violence? Moran asks if a people really can be said to 'choose' democracy over war and vice versa.¹⁹³ As answers to these questions, Moran argues that in Liberian political discourse violence and democracy are not conceptually opposed, but aspects of the same understanding of legitimacy. She suggests that Liberian history can be understood as an on-going interplay between themes of democracy and violence enacted at both local and national levels.¹⁹⁴ In this chapter I approach the 2011 Liberian elections from a similar perspective. I suggest that the elections, despite the relatively low levels of violence that occurred, cannot be seen as a final break with war. Instead the elections in this case rather make Liberia's wartime past more evident. War and peace are entangled, not opposite ends, and the elections illustrate this continuity. For instance, as pointed out by Harris and Lewis in their analysis of the Liberian elections, many of the political actors with popularity built on war records returned in 2011, illustrating how the time passed since the war, compared to the 2005 elections, did not appear to have altered the environment.¹⁹⁵

The use of post-war rebel networks during post-conflict election processes, whether or not this leads to the use, or threat of use, of violence, is an illustrative example of these war-peace

¹⁹² See for example; Andreas Mehler, "Political Parties and Violence in Africa: Systematic Reflections against Empirical Background" and Liisa Laakso, "Insights into Electoral Violence in Africa", in Ed. Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler, *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2007, and Höglund, Kristine, "Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies: Concepts, Causes, and Consequences, in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21:3, 412-427, 2010.

¹⁹³ Mary H. Moran, *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁵ David Harris and Tereza Lewis, "Liberia in 2011: Still ploughing its own democratic furrow?", in *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 51:1, 76-96, 2013, p. 81.

entanglements. The analysis does not emphasise electoral violence as such but rather the category of actors who are often associated with this type of violence, namely ex-combatants in the form of former rebel soldiers. Yet, as also this chapter aims to show that the mobilisation of ex-combatants and other actors associated with a past war during elections, contrary to what is often assumed, is not *necessarily* done with the purpose of committing violence. Nor does such mobilisation necessarily lead to large-scale outbreaks of violence. The case of the 2011 Liberian elections will show that, while such actors can be used for violent purposes, as they have been in post-conflict elections in Africa and elsewhere over the years, their violent potential is far from the only reason why the political elite was interested in them.

The two main presidential candidates and their ties to ex-combatant networks

This section introduces the two main presidential candidates of the Liberian 2011 elections, as seen from the perspective of two individuals who became intimately involved in mobilising support for their electoral campaigns.

- *Winston Tubman and the vigilante leader*

It was a hot day in April. The rainy season had yet to begin and there had been no rains last night which would have cooled the morning hours slightly. I was in Sinkor, Monrovia, on one of the streets off Tubman Boulevard. I had not been walking for more than half an hour to get to our meeting point but still I was covered in sweat and dust. Two young men selling telephone scratch cards at the street corner noticed me and offered me some shade underneath their parasol by their small fair booth. I was grateful to find cover from the hot Liberian sun and took a seat on the floor beside the friendly young men. I was probably early, or Alex was late – either way I could see him approaching from afar after chatting with the men for some time. Alex sticks out in a crowd. He is taller and bigger than most Liberian men and he is dressed according to basketball fashion. He walked slowly though, not in the same determined way he usually did, and for a moment I thought he looked more tired than I had ever seen him before. But I forgot about that when he saw me, cheered up and came to greet me. This meeting would turn out to be very different from when we last saw each other. That time, only a few months before, the Liberian national elections were approaching, hopes were high and Alex had big

dreams for the future. Winston Tubman's run for the presidency had opened up new opportunities for him and a network of men around him, men who could be used as security providers, men with a background in rebel movements or vigilante groups.

The very first time I met Alex, in 2009, he had emerged as a leader of a vigilante group in Sinkor, Monrovia, a few years earlier. The group saw themselves as local defenders; defenders of their community in an area where the Liberian National Police (LNP) did not dare to enter at night. At dusk the young men of the group gathered. After Alex' instructions they were divided into smaller groups and took turns to patrol the neighbourhood until the early morning hours. Anyone not belonging to the community found wandering their streets was stopped and questioned. Suspected criminals, or anyone caught committing a crime, were to be brought directly to Alex and thereafter be handed over to the police for further investigation. This did not always happen, however. From time to time, the vigilantes took it upon themselves not only to be the neighbourhood's watchmen, they also saw fit to determine the captured individual's guilt or innocence after an on-the-spot interrogation, as well as the punishment.¹⁹⁶

Alex himself had not been a rebel soldier. Among the approximately fifty men who made up the vigilante group, that made him an exception. The men came from different backgrounds, ethnic groups, parts of Liberia and rebel factions. What they now shared was not only their community and their status as ex-combatants but also poverty and unemployment. The members of the community could not afford to pay the vigilantes, but most contributed a little money or food to keep the group going. In this way, being a vigilante was for some of these young men a way to secure a daily meal, but it was also a way to make use of skills learned during the war somehow. According to vigilante members and other members of the community Alex had been chosen because he was well respected, well known, and a trusted man in the neighbourhood. He, in turn, made good use of the ex-combatants' skills as informal neighbourhood security providers. Years in wars and rebel movements had taught them how

¹⁹⁶ For more details and information on Liberian vigilantes see: Kantor, Ana and Mariam Persson, "Liberian Vigilantes: Informal Security Provision on the Margins of Security Sector Reform", in Ed. Magnus Ekengren and Greg Simons, *The Politics of Security Sector Reform – Challenges and Opportunities for the European Union's Global Role*, Ashgate, 2011.

to organise themselves, to secure an area, where to take positions in order to protect their neighbourhood and ambush suspected criminals. They knew how to fight, but more importantly, as Alex and others in the community often pointed out, they were fearless and feared for their violent nature. The knowledge that the vigilante group was primarily composed of ex-combatants had a deterrent effect on outsiders.¹⁹⁷

But the advantages of having former rebels as vigilantes also came with its perils. The ex-combatants were more likely to take the law into their own hands when it came to punishment. The rule that the suspected criminal was to be brought to Alex first and then to the police was, as discussed, broken from time to time. The ex-combatants' past experiences from war and their fearless attitude towards violence made them unpredictable and difficult to control. Catching a person in the act of committing a crime, the ex-combatants were more likely than others to resort to violence immediately. The community's attitudes towards the vigilante group were thereby ambivalent. As a community member who was not part of the vigilante group told me, the vigilante group enjoyed strong support in the community because the alternative was non-existent: the Liberian National Police were neither present nor trusted. The ex-combatants' skills in security and fearless attitude made them valuable vigilantes in the eyes of the community, even though the ex-combatants were often treated with suspicion because of their past in the war and their presumed violent nature.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the community would rather have them organised in the vigilante group than not. As vigilantes their skills proved to be useful, while they at the same time, at least to a certain extent, could be controlled as they worked for the community instead of constituting a threat against it.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Personal communication with a community member where the vigilante group had been active, April, 2012.

CDC mobilising¹⁹⁹

When I met Alex again in September 2011, life had taken a new turn for him and the vigilante group. Alex and the men around him had, as they saw it themselves, “gone into politics”²⁰⁰. Or as one could also see it, Liberian politicians had reached out to ex-combatants. Alex had been approached by Winston Tubman – the man who, in May 2011, had been chosen as the presidential candidate for the CDC party. After being nominated, Tubman set out to cater for his personal protection, to establish his own informal security group. Tubman wanted men around him who could work as his personal bodyguards, men who could protect him when campaigning but possibly also show force, power and status. To find men suitable for the job Tubman turned to Alex. This was not the first time Tubman had run for president and not the first time he had turned to Alex either. Like Johnson Sirleaf, Tubman, the nephew of Liberia’s longest-serving president, William Tubman, was part of and brought up within the old Americo-Liberian elite. He had degrees from London School of Economics, Cambridge and Harvard University and had owned his own law firm. During Doe’s years in power Tubman served as Liberia’s Minister of Justice. After the fall of Doe, Tubman had continued his career as a diplomat within the UN and had just left a position as the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Somalia in time for the 2005 elections in order to compete for the presidency.²⁰¹ Tubman came to run for Doe’s old party, the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL).²⁰²

Tubman had come to know the vigilante leader and had called on him to establish an informal security force of ex-combatants to surround him during his campaigning in the 2005 elections. Tubman had lost the race against Ellen Johnson Sirleaf back then, and Alex and his men had returned to their normal life and business. But for the 2011 elections, Tubman needed the vigilante leader and his network once again. The security force established around Tubman and the CDC party in many ways came to resemble a military unit. Alex and four other men,

²⁰⁰ A common expression among my informants in order to explain their partaking primarily as informal security providers during the 2011 elections.

²⁰¹ See for example: BBC, “Liberian poll: the main contenders”, October, 5, 2005, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4309302.stm>

²⁰² For a detailed analysis of the 2005 Liberian elections see for example: Harris, David, 2012.

the others being former rebel generals, were chosen as the main commanders. Some of these men had also worked for Tubman once before in 2005, while others were new recruits. Each commander had a specific task and main responsibility for areas such as Tubman's overall day and night-time security, campaigning and motorcade security, private house and party headquarters security, etc. Under each commander, Alex assigned ex-combatants from his vigilante group to work as security providers. The closest group to Tubman was composed of approximately twenty-five men. However, the overall mobilised informal security network around CDC was much larger than this. George Weah, the well-known footballer and former CDC presidential candidate from 2005 who during the 2011 elections ran for the vice presidency under Tubman, also had his own personal informal security force, resembling in structure the one organised for Tubman. But above all this there was an additional informal security group working for the CDC party, which some informants called the 'Battle Cry'. The Battle Cry was a much larger group, composed of approximately 1,000 men and a few women, most of them ex-combatants. The Battle Cry was not operating autonomously but was under the command of Tubman's security group. The group had their members both in Monrovia and out in the counties and worked as a reinforcement of Tubman's security group during his campaigning. The group was, for example, to check and secure an area before Tubman and his closest security men arrived in towns and villages to campaign. The members of Battle Cry never received any regular payment from the CDC party but were often given food and drinks and, sometimes, small amounts of money. The members of Alex' security group closest to Tubman could count on somewhat more regular payments from the CDC party, but for them, as for the members of the wider security structures of the party, it was the hopes and promise of an eventual electoral victory for Winston Tubman that mattered. When I talked about this with Alex and the other commanders of the security group, they all were very enthusiastic. If Tubman were to win in the elections, they all felt sure that the victory would imply permanent security jobs. At least the commanders were to be incorporated into the official security system, either as bodyguards or in other positions within the formal security institutions, since Tubman as president would surely be able to provide for this. Where they would end up if Tubman was to lose, they did not even want to think about. But they were sure this would mean that their struggle, with unemployment and poverty, would certainly continue. A victory for the incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, they argued, would not give them any benefits at all.

- ***Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the former LURD general***

It was September, just before the elections, and it had proved rather difficult to get hold of any of my informants, but to get hold of Michael²⁰³ had been nearly impossible. We spoke on the phone and arranged to meet, but it often ended with Michael texting to apologise that he couldn't make it; something had come up again; "election-business" he said. Michael was busier than any of my informants in Liberia, but then again, Michael's situation was very different from all the other ex-combatants I know. He has done what the others only dream of; he has managed to secure employment in the formal sector, a senior position within one of the country's security institutions. If "reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income",²⁰⁴ Michael has certainly been socially and economically integrated into civil society. But Michael's success lies not in his abandonment of his wartime rebel networks, but rather the opposite.

As the 2011 elections came closer it became more and more evident that the network of ex-combatants at the Guthrie/Sime Darby plantation, who had remained there since the end of the war (as presented in the previous chapter), had a role to play in the political developments in Liberia. Through the three former generals who had kept active at the plantation following the government takeover, the ex-combatants within the plantation's security force were connected to influential political actors. By following the trajectory of Michael as one of the three main commanders at the plantation in particular, the mutual dependence between key political actors, on the one hand, and key former rebel commanders with the ability to influence post-war rebel networks, on the other, once again becomes evident. Through Michael the ex-combatants at the plantation could be used for political purpose and through him the ex-combatants themselves could take advantage of this political event.

²⁰³ In order to protect the identities of my informants, Michael's real name or current employer will not be presented in this chapter.

²⁰⁴ United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Centre, "What is DDR – What definitions are used by the UN?", available at: <http://www.unddr.org/whatisddr.php>

Michael had already during his time in control over Guthrie successfully managed to secure and leverage political connections. As presented, authorities and politicians, even at the highest level of the transitional government (NTGL), cooperated after the war with the rebel leadership occupying the plantation. In doing so they managed to take advantage of the financial resources generated by the rubber industry. Also after the 2005 national elections Johnson Sirleaf's government, as discussed in the previous chapter, negotiated with the rebel commanders in order to regain control over Guthrie, and Michael was the main negotiator on the occupiers' side. He became the 'gate-keeper' between the political and economic elite and the ex-combatants at the plantation. The elite needed the ex-combatants and the ex-combatants needed the elite. Michael could thereby operate as the link between these actors, making cooperation possible and a mutual dependence fruitful for both sides. Even after he and the other ex-combatants had officially handed over control of Guthrie in 2006, Michael remained an important actor both for the politicians and the ex-combatants. He successfully negotiated reintegration benefits for his former combatants with the Sirleaf Johnson government but also stayed in close contact with the ex-combatants who remained at the plantation as informal security providers. Moreover, Michael also managed to use the contacts he gained during his time managing the plantation, after the rebels had handed over control, for his own benefit in order to secure employment within Liberia's official security structures, namely the Intelligence Department of the LNP. Furthermore, Michael had done what few ex-combatants have had the ability to do; he had invested some of his resources in university studies, and by 2012 he would have obtained a degree in Criminal Justice.²⁰⁵ While using his skills and contacts, Michael has continued to make a career within the official security structures, as he later attained a senior position within one of Liberia's formal security institutions.

²⁰⁵ However, even though few ex-combatants have had the ability to study at the university, some of the more influential former commanders appear to have had degrees in Criminal Justice sponsored by politicians or other influential actors. Why the trend has been to obtain a degree in Criminal Justice specifically among more successful ex-combatants I can only speculate. This could be seen as a way to make use of previously acquired knowledge in security, a field many of them know well from years in battle, and an attempt to secure a future position on the formal side of the Liberian security system when many other sectors are closed to them.

UP mobilising²⁰⁶

For the 2011 elections, Michael once again became important for both the political elite and the ex-combatants in his network. In March 2011, during the voter registration process, he launched an ex-combatant organisation based around the plantation area. When Michael first had the idea he presented it to a senior local politician in Sirleaf Johnson's government in Bomi County, where the rubber plantation is located, who decided to sponsor the project. Michael says that he came up with the idea because he wanted an organised network for ex-combatants' rights. He wanted, he says, to keep them out of trouble, drugs and criminal activities, and he wanted to work for their employment opportunities by using his links to the political elite. But whatever motives Michael had for starting the organisation, it was evident that for the politicians, facing an up-coming election, supporting Michael's organisation was a very strategic way of gaining votes. Michael soon had over 1,000 ex-combatants enlisted in his organisation and, the network, was approached by politicians at the highest level.

Michael and the leadership of the organisation, composed of himself and two other former rebel generals, even had a few meetings with the president herself. The outcome of these meetings was that Michael and the former commanders promised to promote Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the UP party in the elections and during the pre-election phase in exchange for financial support and promises of scholarships for higher education for some of the ex-combatants, should the Sirleaf Johnson government stay in power. As Michael explained, he first encouraged the ex-combatants to register for the elections; then, as he said, "I told them why, when and how to vote". Michael's influence on the ex-combatants also as voters was accordingly significant.

²⁰⁶ This section is mainly based on personal communication and interviews with Michael in September, October 2011 and April 2012. However, much of the information in the chapter is also based on several interviews and meetings with ex-combatants, and workers at Guthrie, Bomi County, Liberia, between the years of 2010 and 2012.

Post-election outcomes

– *The losers*

When I met Alex again in Monrovia in April 2012, his outlook had changed dramatically from the time I last saw him, only a few months earlier, just before the 2011 Liberian elections. Before the elections, Alex and the network of ex-combatants around him had been confident about the future. As Tubman's VIP security group they were not only able to secure an income, they also felt proud to have a job and to be able to use their skills in security for something they saw as a positive cause. Having known Alex and some of the other men in his group for a few years, I found that the difference in their attitudes in the pre-election period was remarkable. They believed that there was a role for them as formal security providers in the future and that Winston Tubman and the CDC party would open doors for them. However, this required an election victory for their candidate, something that did not happen.

The results of the first round of the presidential elections, held on October 11 2011, were released on October 25, giving incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf the lead with 43.9% of the votes, followed by Winston Tubman with 32.7%. The former rebel leader Prince Johnson, now a presidential candidate for the National Union for Democratic Progress (NUDP) party, took the first round's third place with 11.6% of the votes.²⁰⁷ As none of the candidates managed to secure an absolute majority, Johnson Sirleaf and Tubman faced a run-off election that was to be held on November 8, 2011. However, Winston Tubman and the CDC claimed that the election had been rigged in Johnson Sirleaf's favour. Tubman and the CDC pulled out of the second round and urged their supporters to boycott the run-offs. For Alex and my other informants supporting Tubman and the CDC, this decision had immeasurable consequences. They felt cheated out of the election victory and were convinced that the elections had been fraudulent, regardless of the approval of international observers. Their frustration grew rapidly, and Liberians and election observers now started to fear renewed violence despite the relatively calm pre-election period. On November 7, the day before the second round of the presidential elections, the protests eventually turned deadly, on a day that my informants

²⁰⁷ National Election Commission (NEC) Liberia, election results available at: <http://www.necliberia.org/results2011/>

refer to as 'Bloody Monday'. Thousands of CDC supporters had gathered outside the party headquarters to urge voters to boycott the run-off elections. Violence broke out as police backed by UN forces blocked a road to prevent the CDC activists from marching into the city. Tear gas was used but also live bullets and at least one young man among the CDC activists died after being shot in the head.²⁰⁸ These events in many ways marked the beginning of the end of the hopes and dreams about a better future that Alex and the men around him had held during the pre-election phase. President Johnson Sirleaf's victory was declared a few days later.

Alex was broken when I met him after the elections. Tubman had left the country, leaving Alex and his men without work. But not only was Alex without a job, he seemed to be unable to get a new one because of his former commitment. Alex's strength, which Tubman clearly had taken advantage of, that he had been a well-known and respected man in his community with the ability to mobilise whole networks of ex-combatants, was now turned into a weakness. The opposition knew him very well, and no one wanted to employ him. With the victory of President Johnson Sirleaf, security positions within the formal security institutions were now completely out of reach, Alex and all my pro-CDC informants argued. But these positions were not beyond reach for ex-combatants on the winning side, those who had supported the president before and during the election process. Now Johnson Sirleaf had to pay them back with whatever means she had, leaving nothing for the losing side. As Alex explained, "CDC can do nothing for the ones they mobilised. They are left with nothing. And now things are even worse than before as the winning side don't want to have anything to do with them." Alex had not only looked for jobs at the formal security institutions, he had visited almost all the private security companies but no one, he said, was willing to offer a position to a man who so clearly was connected to the losing side. For Alex and the ex-combatants working for him this was a 'winner-takes-all' situation, and they had been supporting the 'wrong' candidate.

²⁰⁸ See for example: BBC News Africa, "Liberia Election: CDC Monrovia protest turns deadly", November 7, 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15624471> and Mats Utas "Liberia post-election: on CDC popularity and odd election results", April 5, 2012, available at: <http://matsutas.wordpress.com/2012/04/05/liberia-post-election-on-cdc-popularity-and-odd-election-results/>

Furthermore, Alex was not only miserable due to his inability to find a job, he was also scared. In December, only a few weeks after the Johnson Sirleaf victory, Alex' house was attacked. Masked men broke into the house in the middle of the night. They took everything of value and smashed the rest, leaving Alex' small home completely devastated. Alex and others in the neighbourhood strongly believed that this was an act perpetrated against Alex as retaliation, retaliation, they argued, due to the fact that he was a CDC man, that he had not been loyal to the ruling elite of Liberia. The police, he said, had not investigated the incident and could even have been involved. He had no evidence of this being so, but this was what he and others believed. From this night Alex did not dare to spend another night in his old house. He feared another attack, he feared revenge and retaliation; he even feared for his life. For six months he had been moving around all over Monrovia, spending the nights at different friends' houses. He never wanted to stay in the same place for long, and he was careful not to let too many people know his whereabouts. Alex, in all those years I had known him, had been proud to be a well-known man in his neighbourhood. Now he saw this as his biggest disadvantage. He and many ex-combatants around him had put everything at stake when he took sides in the elections. This political event had been their most promising option, and a risk they considered worth taking. But they had lost it all.

– The winners

For Michael, the elections meant something entirely different. As I could see when we met again in April after the elections, Michael and his network of ex-combatants had clearly benefited from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's victory. The victory meant that Michael could feel more secure in his position at the security institution, a position he most likely would have lost given a new political leadership. For his ex-combatants Michael had used his personal contacts with senior politicians to get funding for over twenty scholarships for university studies. He had been the one appointing the candidates for the scholarships, choosing among those ex-combatants in his network who already had a high school diploma and whom he saw as promising. He had managed to recommend several others for different informal security positions through his contacts at various institutions and private organisations. This was the government's way to pay him back for the support he had mobilised during the electoral

campaign. The official election results from the first round of voting in Bomi County, where Michael's ex-combatant organisation was based and where he had the main part of his network, gave Ellen Johnson Sirleaf 65.3 per cent of the votes, as compared to Winston Tubman's 28.7 per cent. For the second round, as Tubman had boycotted the elections, Johnson Sirleaf won a clear victory of 92.4 per cent.²⁰⁹ Michael often laughed and told me that *he* had won Bomi for Ellen. He said this jokingly, but it was not hard to tell that he saw some truth behind his statement. It is of course impossible to say precisely how much influence Michael and his network of ex-combatants actually had on the Liberian elections, but what is evident, judging from how much the politicians invested in their contacts with him and his former fighters, the impact was significant.

Michael has remained important for a large network of ex-combatants, despite the war being over for many years. They come to him for favours and small hand-outs but most importantly because through him, if they are lucky, they have the possibility of finding employment. For the Liberian elite, on the other hand, Michael is just as valuable. His network of ex-combatants is large and loyal, and through him politicians and others can access these post-war rebel structures whether for personal gain, mobilising votes, for unofficially employing security providers or for other social, financial or political purposes.

Conclusion

- *Post-war rebel networks used for their violent potential?*

During the Sierra Leonean general elections in 2007, Maya Christensen and Mats Utas followed what turned out to be a remobilisation of ex-combatants into 'security squads' for the political parties. The exact motives for mobilising ex-combatants were never officially specified, but as Christensen and Utas found, the former fighters themselves argued that, alongside a lack of trust in the formal security institutions, political leaders chose to employ them as they were afraid of the consequences of *not* mobilising them. The politicians, in their

²⁰⁹ National Election Commission (NEC), Liberia 2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections, Bomi County, available at: http://www.necliberia.org/results2011/county_3_1.html

eyes, feared another uprising and were therefore forced to work with them. Other statements indicated that the task forces in addition to providing security for the politicians were also used to intimidate, and at times, to 'create a general state of panic' with opposing political parties' task forces being used against one another.²¹⁰ Furthermore, Christensen and Utas' informants also regarded the elections as an opportunity to benefit in ways the end of the war never offered them.²¹¹ But the most important motivating factor for the ex-combatants was their expectations for the future. Their participation in the security squads, they believed, could bring future benefits such as jobs and education.²¹²

Many of the incentives mentioned above were also relevant for my informants in the 2011 Liberian elections. However, during the elections Liberia witnessed far fewer violent encounters than Sierra Leone. I do not speculate on why the outcome of the use of post-war rebel networks was more violent in Sierra Leone here. Yet, the issue of time passed since the war might be a factor worth mentioning in brief. As was later to be discovered in the Sierra Leonean 2012 elections, the levels of violence decreased compared to those of 2007, and were only a matter of small-scale and localised incidents, which did not suggest a high level of central planning, as noted by Conteh and Harris. As the same authors have pointed out, it may be that violence in the Sierra Leonean case was no longer an efficient vote-collecting strategy for the main parties.²¹³ More importantly for this study is that the Liberian case questions the assumption that the use of post-war rebel networks is done simply with the motive of mobilising electoral violence; a conclusion one might otherwise be tempted to draw analysing the Sierra Leonean case from 2007 in isolation. In the Liberian case the use of networks of ex-combatants does not seem to have been intended to create an overall state of panic in any sense, even though the politicians surrounded by ex-combatants while campaigning could have had an intimidating effect on the public. For Winston Tubman for example, campaigning in the company of the network of the ex-combatants Alex could secure for him could also have been a way to show force, power and status, thereby attracting votes. Danny Hoffman found

²¹⁰ Maya M. Christensen and Mats Utas, "Mercenaries of Democracy: The 'Politricks' of Remobilized Combatants in the 2007 General Elections, Sierra Leone", in *African Affairs*, 107/429, 515-539, 2008, pp. 521-22.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 528.

²¹³ Felix M. Conteh and David Harris, "Swings and roundabouts: The vagaries of democratic consolidation and 'electoral rituals' in Sierra Leone", *Critical African Studies*, 6:1, 57-70, 2014, p. 67.

examples of a similar logic during the 2005 Liberian elections when a businessman from Grand Cape Mount County decided to run for the House of Representatives. The businessman found a former rebel commander an indispensable ally, as he had the capacity to mobilise 'supporters' in Monrovia. Due to his connections higher up in the Liberian hierarchy, the commander, who kept a network of ex-combatants close to him, learned that the businessman needed young men who could rally for him on appointed days, taking to the streets wearing his party colours and face on T-shirts. The businessman needed, as Hoffman argues, a display of force and support. With ex-combatants dancing, shouting and marching in his name he manifested power. With his army of "violent labour" he could make it clear for the Liberian people that he had the strength to govern.²¹⁴ Tubman's mobilisation of the ex-combatants in 2011 could be seen from a similar perspective, as a way to publicly show force and power, partly through displaying the ability to control ex-combatants. But maybe even more importantly in the case of the 2011 elections, given that the networks of ex-combatants and their dependants were still well connected, operational, large and loyal, having access to them could be an effective way to mobilise votes in exchange for promised benefits. This, I would argue, shows how the violent potential of post-war rebel networks is only one, and not necessarily the most important, aspect of why the political elite finds these actors valuable during political events such as elections even long after the war ended.

- ***Ex-combatants as strategic actors?***

At the same time, the strategic use of post-war rebel networks by the political elite should not make us overlook the equally strategic use of the political elite by post-war rebel networks. As noted by Liisa Laakso, researching electoral violence in Africa, groups mobilised as potential perpetrators of violence should not be disregarded as a passive reserve manipulated by political leaders. Instead violent campaigning for the winning party can be a strategy for marginalised groups to gain political power after elections.²¹⁵ This argument fits well with the case of the Liberian ex-combatants during the 2011 elections, despite the Liberian post-war

²¹⁴ Danny Hoffman, *The War Machines: Young Men and Violence in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, p. 192.

²¹⁵ Liisa Laakso, "Insights into Electoral Violence in Africa", in Ed. Matthias Basedau, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler, *Votes, Money and Violence: Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Nordic Africa Institute, 2007, p. 228.

rebel networks' not being used for the specific purpose of violent campaigning as such. The fact that the political elite wanted to make use of and manipulate post-war rebel networks for their own benefits does not take away the ex-combatants' own agency and ability to make strategic choices in their support of political candidates. Yet at the same time it should be noted that not all of the ex-combatants within the post-war rebel networks had the same freedom of action when it came to taking sides in the political game. An actor like Michael, who ultimately had become a gatekeeper between the two sides, obviously had more room to manoeuvre than most low-ranking ex-combatants. Still, these post-war rebel networks were far from passive tools in the hands of the political elite in this regard. The elections were rather an opportunity, albeit a risky one, to take advantage of their wartime pasts as rebel soldiers, both for ex-combatants who had secured more influential positions in post-war Liberia and among the majority who had not.

- ***Post-war rebel networks as a resource for stability and livelihood?***

Terrence Lyons, researching political mobilisation during post-conflict elections in militarised societies, emphasizes selective incentives – such as patronage – as one of the major ways for political parties to mobilise support. Selective incentives may take the form of material benefits, such as salary or employment, or non-material benefits such as prestige or a feeling of efficacy. Individuals might be willing to join a political party, social movement or insurgency because the selective incentives are only available to those who participate. In order to maintain the benefits of selective incentives, a difference between the treatment of one's in-group and out-groups is required. Patronage distributed only to supporters of political parties is an example of this.²¹⁶ In the case of the 2011 Liberian elections it is clear that politicians used this strategy to mobilise support among the ex-combatants and that both the material and non-material benefits of the selective incentives were significant for the mobilised ex-combatants.

²¹⁶ Terrence Lyons, 2005, p. 41.

For my informants, the elections were above all else an opportunity to find employment. As pointed out by Kathleen Jennings amongst others, in Liberia, the language and expectations of what the reintegration process was to bring about was clearly incompatible with the implementation and the resources assigned for this task. As Jennings notes, the reintegration concept in itself is vague, and could refer to either a more ambitious or minimalistic reintegration agenda. In the Liberian case this led to heightened expectations, followed by frustration and dissatisfaction among the ex-combatants. Many were unable to find paid employment after completing the DDDR training course, accusing the DDDR process of failing to improve their situations and leaving them with unfulfilled promises. By as early as December 2003, disappointment in the process had led to riots causing the death of nine people and a temporary suspension of the DDDR.²¹⁷ One of the fundamental issues was that the ex-combatants were under the impression that completion of the DDDR would automatically lead to employment. However, this was in fact impossible for the weak Liberian state and economy to cater for. Ex-combatants, like most Liberians, had to find their own way to rebuild their lives and secure their livelihood. For some of the ex-combatants, who had spent years in the war among their fellow combatants, leaving their closest network, their wartime rebel structures, was not a realistic alternative. Jairo Munive has analysed the concept of unemployment in Liberia in relation to youth and ex-combatants. With an estimated eighty-five per cent unemployment rate, this is of course an enormous challenge. However, as Munive concludes, since most of the economy is informal in Liberia, the term 'unemployed' is of questionable utility.²¹⁸ The international community, Munive argues, has viewed ex-combatants and young people in general from a bureaucratic perspective, casting those without formal employment as unproductive, making it imperative to transform 'unruly' ex-combatants into productive citizens. But in reality, Munive shows, contrary to these representations, young people are actively engaged in economic activities for survival, constituting the backbone of the Liberian post-war economy.²¹⁹ As formal employment is not an option for Munive's informants, informality becomes the sole means of survival.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Kathleen M. Jennings, "Seeing DDR from Below: Challenges and dilemmas raised by the experience of ex-combatants in Liberia", *Fafo report* 2008:03, p. 6.

²¹⁸ Jairo Munive, "The army of 'unemployed' young people", *Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark, Vol 18(3): 321-338, 2010, p. 323.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

For the Liberian ex-combatants I have followed, before, during and after the elections, the use of their wartime rebel structures has become a way to access the informal employment market in post-war Liberia. They are also valuable as labour; as was seen from the way they were used during the 2011 elections. They can use their skills in security learned during the war, they are potentially violent and they can be rather influential and very efficient in mobilising support for their candidate, as their networks are often large and loyal to former commanders. I would therefore argue that for many ex-combatants, in order to find employment, it thereby becomes strategically important to preserve, rather than abandon wartime rebel structures. Meanwhile, as developments during this election process are yet another example of, for the Liberian political elite, the reintegration of ex-combatants and the dissolution of post-war rebel structures, contrary to the official approach and statements, would be counter-productive, as the networks of ex-combatants are useful for their own political and financial interests. As could be seen during the 2011 Liberian elections, a mutual dependence between the elite and the ex-combatants still existed even eight years after the war had been declared over. And during events like these, this mutual dependence becomes even more visible. Nonetheless, the stakes are incredibly high for the ex-combatants when they take sides in political events such as elections. While this can be an opportunity to sometimes even gain formal employment, it may also end disastrously, as survival in Liberia in many ways is connected to having the right connections to the political elite.

- ***The 2011 Liberian elections - a wartime logic?***

The disbandment of rebel structures is commonly considered vital, due the general view that ex-combatants in lingering rebel structures constitute an imminent security risk with the potential to drive a post-conflict country back into warfare. However, in the 2011 Liberian elections, the use of post-war rebel networks was not necessarily contributing to a risk of renewed war. In fact, I would suggest that the involvement of post-war rebel networks during the election process could possibly have had conflict-mitigating effects, as the elections gave many ex-combatants some sort of employment opportunity, albeit informally. Furthermore, there were no signs of any remobilisation to new rebel factions during the elections. As

pointed out by Kieran Mitton, success in politically reintegrating ex-combatants should not be judged solely by the absence of renewed violence or the conduct of free and fair elections. The extent to which ex-combatants hold faith in the political system and peace to deliver solutions to problems of social and economic disparity is more relevant.²²¹ Applying this understanding to the 2011 Liberian elections, we must conclude that the relatively peaceful completion of the elections is not enough to say that a successful demobilisation of ex-combatant networks has been brought about, nor that these first post-war elections organised by the Liberians themselves signalled a final break with the country's wartime past. Former fighters were instead politically useful in their capacity as ex-combatants, highlighting how war and peace continues to be intimately linked in Liberia. In a recent article by Bøås and Utas the authors come to a similar conclusion in their assessment of the 2011 elections. With a point of departure in the historical background of the country's conflict, Bøås and Utas conclude that Johnson Sirleaf's electoral victory should not be interpreted as an indication that the country has entered into a new stage of peace and reconciliation, or as an evidence of a strengthened democracy. Instead, the authors suggest, the electoral results could even be seen as cementing old cleavages leading to the civil war in the first place.²²² The 'winner-takes-all' effects of the Liberian 2011 elections for my ex-combatant informants support this analysis.

The elections were an opportunity for Liberian ex-combatants, which could lead to post-election advantages, though only on the winning side. In this sense democracy was far from strengthened, as the winning side in the eyes of the losers were not considered more legitimate than they had been before the elections. But perhaps more importantly, the elections never brought the envisioned final break with the past wars. The mobilisation of the ex-combatants, from their own perspective, rather than wanting to once again take part in potential violence or renewed warfare, was, I suggest, an entrepreneurial way to secure employment, by all available means. At the same time, we should not forget that these

²²¹ Kieran Mitton, "Engaging with disengagement: The political reintegration of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front", in Ed. Mats Berdal and David Ucko, *Reintegrating Armed Groups after Conflict: Politics, violence and transition*, Routledge Studies in Intervention and Statebuilding, 2009, p. 173.

²²² Morten Bøås and Mats Utas, "The Political Landscape of Postwar Liberia: Reflections on National Reconciliation and Elections", *Africa Today*, 60(4), (47-65), 2014.

networks were trained and capable of violence and warfare. Used in the wrong way by the political elite or other financially powerful and influential actors, they are potentially dangerous to future stability and peace in Liberia. There is no doubt that the Liberian political elite were playing a dangerous game with their strategic use of post-war rebel structures and that democracy was far from stable in the country.

6. Once a rebel, always a rebel?

Ex-combatants and post-war identities

In this thesis we have followed former rebels who have survived peace by clinging to their ex-combatant identity, wartime links and post-war rebel networks. Through this identity, these links and networks, they have been able to secure their livelihood, temporary jobs and some form of a social safety net. But these former rebels have also been identified as people to fear, as a menace to society or as violent labour. They have often been associated with crime and insecurity and, in reports and research, have more often than not been perceived as the real threats to lasting peace. There are, in other words, normative perceptions of who the ex-combatants are, and what can be expected of them. This chapter explores what it means in practice to be an ex-combatant in contemporary Liberia, given such perceptions. More precisely, I consider the consequences of being identified, and of identifying oneself, with a category still so emotionally charged as the ex-combatant one, and of living with this identity today, years after peace was declared.

When it comes to the meaning of such an identity it is herein assumed that any individual possesses several different identities or 'social roles'. These identities, or roles, can be used by the individuals themselves or by others to express their belonging to or dissociation from a certain group or social category. According to this conceptualisation of identity, being an ex-combatant can be *one* of an individual's many identities. It can be a more or less important part of that person's self-image and a more or less vital aspect of how others view that person. When I discuss an ex-combatant identity in this chapter, it is understood as something more than a group's shared past as actual combatants. I take as a point of departure that these individuals themselves, as well as others, ascribe certain *characteristics* to this group, characteristics that in theory can be both positive and negative in nature. In other words, what it means to be an ex-combatant and to live with this identity, I argue, will depend to a great extent on not only the past experiences shared by this group of having been combatants, but maybe more importantly, on people's notions and understandings of characteristics *believed* to be shared by this group.

Research within the DDR literature, from academic articles to more policy oriented reports, tells us that ex-combatants post-war are vulnerable and often stigmatised, that they tend to be feared and hated, but also that they are among the few in war-affected countries who actually get assistance and support following conflict. This, however, can lead in turn to jealousy and feelings of injustice among civilians, causing ex-combatants to be even more disliked.²²³ Findings have shown that some do best by hiding their ex-combatant status in order to better blend in with civil society. But for others, as the research herein has revealed, having access to post-war rebel networks can be the key to getting by in their everyday struggle to make a living in a context where there are few other opportunities.

As discussed, this thesis does not attempt to analyse the situation for all of those many Liberians who could be identified as an ex-combatant in a general manner. In this thesis we have instead followed individuals within this group who, for different reasons, have kept their links to wartime structures, individuals who have chosen not to hide their ex-combatant status, their militarised backgrounds and their skills within security provision but who instead have chosen to make use of these experiences in a variety of ways. In this chapter I explore what the identity as an ex-combatant means for these individuals specifically. To what extent does their combatant past shape their lives today? What do they themselves associate with the notion of being an ex-combatant? And how does the way that others – such as fellow community members and other Liberians, the elite, international community and media – view and perceive them affect their lives, and who they are today? What doors and opportunities can such an identity close or open?

I argue that there are neither easy answers to such questions nor one common trajectory that these ex-combatants are bound to take. In order to come closer to an understanding of the

²²³ As discussed in more detail in the introduction, ever since international efforts to end prolonged conflicts after the Cold War began to include more focused initiatives to deal with the situation of ex-combatants post-war, a growing body of literature has been devoted to challenges faced by them or the societies they are expected to be reintegrated into. Policy-oriented analyses of such challenges have over the years for example come from different UN organs, humanitarian NGO's and policy institute. Academic research on the topic can mainly be found within the field of political sciences and anthropology. These analyses of the situation of ex-combatants often have a particular focus on DDR programmes. However, less is known about the challenges faced by ex-combatants after and beyond such programmes and international peace-building initiatives.

post-war reality that this specific group of ex-combatants are faced with, and ultimately how they themselves impact society at large, we will once again follow former combatants for whom post-war rebel networks in different ways have been central to their post-war struggles. This chapter will provide some insights into three ex-combatants' post-war lives in particular, Abraham, Malcolm and Jacob. These ex-combatant narratives will hopefully add a deeper understanding of the post-war reality ex-combatants may face. Malcolm and Jacob have a background as commanders, while Abraham has not. Although this will not be a main focus for this chapter, it may provide valuable insights on whether a background as a commander brings specific post-war advantages or whether such a background only makes the ex-combatant identity a heavier burden to carry. Furthermore, in this chapter we will follow these ex-combatants under rather different circumstances than in the previous chapters. Here I seek answers to what it means to be an ex-combatant and part of a post-war rebel network when there are no wars to be fought, no important political events to be mobilised for, when community members cannot pay them to work as vigilantes or when there are no big security assignments to be carried out for elite actors. Does the identity as an ex-combatant then partly fade? Or will this identity for some reason become even more relevant under such circumstances? Will these situations shatter, or even strengthen, post-war rebel networks? And if they do continue to exist, can such networks simply be dormant, or do they remain active but in new ways or shapes? These are complex issues, and it is important to bear in mind that what peacetime offers for these ex-combatants will of course vary depending on a series of different factors, making it difficult to seek general answers. But I suggest that by focusing on a few individuals, with the experience of facing peace as ex-combatants and as part of post-war rebel networks, we will come closer to an understanding of what former rebels are, and do, several years after the end of war, and thereby what relevance such networks have in contemporary Liberia, both for individuals and the society at large.

The former rebel soldiers I have followed in the chapters of this dissertation have one important thing in common: all of them are men. This is an important factor which needs to be taken into serious consideration when analysing post-war Liberia for the simple reason that many of the rebel soldiers fighting in the fourteen year long wars were women. Yet, within

the post-war rebel networks I have followed during the years, women have remained largely absent or invisible. We therefore simply need to ask ourselves; where are the women? In this chapter I explore the possibility that the post-war identity as an ex-combatant might be more problematic for a former female rebel soldier than for a male one and that women for this reason have chosen to stay away from post-war rebel networks to a larger extent than their fellow male combatants. In other words, I consider that women in general, contrary to many men with a combatant background, have more to lose than to gain by being identified as an ex-combatant or to actively use this identity, or networks attached to it, themselves. In line with such reasoning I therefore also seek answers as to why militarised or securitised masculinities in this case appear to be less problematic than the equivalent femininities.

Images of war and rebels

“The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story, become the only story”²²⁴

Following the end of the first Liberian war in 1996, Philippa Atkinson set out to analyse what she claimed to be false images of chaos and pathos that had been projected by media coverage of war in West Africa. What she found in the Western media, the few times the Liberian conflict was mentioned, was how Liberia, alongside Rwanda and Somalia, was used as an example of the nightmare scenarios the West both fears and expects much of Africa to descend to. The focus within articles and reports on the crisis itself, Atkinson found, emphasised the anarchy and brutality of the war, and the atrocities perpetrated against civilians and foreign nationals, often by child soldiers. The reports were often accompanied by photographs of rebels dressed up in unusual battle gear or of skulls and bones decorating rebel camps. Atkinson saw a will in the media coverage to depict a ‘weird’ war, fought with unique ferocity, by mad princes, warlords and manipulated and drug-crazed children.²²⁵ In Atkinson’s examination of the media reports she found a significant focus on the atrocities

²²⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The danger of a single story”, *TED Talks*, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg>

²²⁵ Philippa Atkinson, “The Liberian civil war – images and reality”, in *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1996.

committed, yet poor analysis of which side had been responsible, and to what end. There had been almost no discussions of the different tactics by the various actors and rebel groups, or of the violence perpetrated and the economic realities of the war economy. As Atkinson notes, the portrayal of the Liberian war as brutal and chaotic fits in well with the more general picture of Africa as depicted by the media. There is a tendency in media reporting to create an image of anarchy when Africa and African conflicts are being discussed. That is a tendency with potentially serious consequences. This image, without much real analysis, is the one that is being conveyed to members of the international community, which in turn will influence that community's political action. As Atkins points out, this influence and importance that the media have in informing experts and decision-makers in the international community cannot be underestimated. As she so rightly emphasises, those who make funding, business, diplomatic, and military decisions cannot avoid being influenced by what have become stereotypical views of African countries at war. There is, therefore, a real danger in the insinuations of such descriptions – that crises in Africa are beyond the experience and understanding of the modern Western world.²²⁶

Liberian combatants have been objects of the same stereotypical portrayals through which the Liberian war was understood (or not understood). It is probably not controversial to assume that when people in western societies think of Liberian rebel soldiers – or more likely African rebels in general, as Liberian rebels presumably would be too specific – they tend to have a picture that corresponds to that of the stereotypical view of African wars, in short, that these individuals as well are beyond understanding. As further discussed by Stephen Ellis, when the world's press became aware of the crisis in Liberia in the mid-1990s, it was through the coverage of an international journalist who travelled with the advancing rebel forces mainly associated with rebel leader Prince Johnson and his INPFL. The focus of this reporting was the bizarre nature of the rebels and, their accoutrements: wigs wore by male fighters along with grotesque decorations such as human bones. The journalists were fascinated by what they understood as an incomprehensible slaughter carried out by rebels looking like freaks in a primeval savagery. They wanted to describe the 'real nature' of Africa, Ellis explains,

²²⁶ Ibid.

that had so often been romanticized. Instead they offered a picture of Liberia as the scene of the wackiest and most ruthless of uncivil wars, where rebels were high on drugs, fighting naked, in Halloween masks or in bizarre make-up, believing that African magic could save them from bullets.²²⁷ The journalists did this without seeking explanations for why this might be, or wanting to find the reasons behind the rebel soldiers' behaviour, or even causes of war. Instead what was seen was mere sensational journalism.

Along the same lines as Atkins' argument, Ellis underlines that even though such descriptions can be dismissed easily after a more thorough look at the situation, one should not underestimate what implications and influence this type of journalism can have. This is the case no matter how superficial the coverage might be, as not only the world's reading or viewing public might be affected; policy-makers and politicians risk taking action in reaction to information provided through such sensational journalism.²²⁸ The American journalist Robert Kaplan's analysis from 1994, discussing the wars in West Africa, strongly contributed to the public notion, which also impacted policy-makers, of West African rebels, and young men in the region in general as mere violent, lost and criminal gangs without a political agenda.²²⁹ However, the critique against Kaplan's simplistic and stereotypical way of viewing wars and war-affected inhabitants in Africa has been substantial. An important response came from Paul Richards against this so-called 'New Barbarism' thesis, in his analysis with a main focus on the Sierra Leonean war. As Richards argued, whereas it cannot be denied that the war in Sierra Leone is one of terror, involving horrific brutality against civilians, this fact still cannot in any way be taken as a proof of a reversion to some kind of essential African savagery as suggested by Kaplan. The whole point with terror, as Richards underlines, is to unsettle its victims. Accounts of terrorised victims of violence do not constitute evidence of the irrationality of violence. Instead this shows the opposite, that the tactics have been carefully calculated. Richards strongly criticises the idea that violence was perpetrated by criminal gangs without a political agenda. In fact, he argues, the war had a clear political context, with belligerents who had perfectly rational political aims, however difficult it may be to justify

²²⁷ Ellis, 2007, pp. 17-18.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

²²⁹ See Robert Kaplan, "The coming anarchy: how scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism, and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet" in *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 273, no.2, February, 1994.

violence perpetrated to pursue these aims. As in any other war, opportunist individuals and groups commit atrocities and looting, yet these opportunistic acts are insufficient in explaining the conflict, which instead dragged on because of social and political factors. Richards concludes that there is no inherent trend towards anarchy in today's West Africa.²³⁰

Although much research following Richards' early response to theories such as Kaplan's has been devoted to the many and often complex reasons for becoming a rebel²³¹ and taking part in the wars in West Africa, and many nuanced analyses have been carried out in order to reach a better understanding of the brutal violence committed during these wars²³², the notion of the Liberian rebel (or African rebel in general) as a mere greed-driven, barbaric young man will not easily vanish from people's mind.

The problematic ex-combatant identity

The image of a rebel, and consequently that of an ex-combatant, is not only a consequence of the often very violent acts committed by combatants during the war, but maybe even more a product of the stereotypical, superficial and often misleading way the war and its combatants have been described and represented in the media and elsewhere, I would argue. Ex-combatants in Liberia all know this. Being violent and unpredictable is often associated with an ex-combatant identity and ex-combatants who cannot, or have chosen not to, hide their past or in different ways take part in post-war rebel networks, must always relate and adapt to such stereotypes. These perceptions are held by actors ranging from researchers and policy-makers to NGO's, international community representatives, and other actors taking part in planning and conducting programs aiming at reintegrating ex-combatants, or active in the writing of reports, analyses and risk-assessments of this group's violent potential and

²³⁰ Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest – War, youth & resources in Sierra Leone*, James Currey, Oxford, 1996, pp. xv-xvii.

²³¹ As discussed, this thesis will not provide specific analysis of the complex and diverging reasons behind the combatants' decision to take part in the war. However, it should be noted that these individual decisions were of course not taken in a vacuum, but relate to the overall root causes of the war of social, economic and security nature.

²³² For a deeper discussion on the motives and strategies behind the type of violence used in the West African wars see for example; Keen, 2008 (for an analysis on why the violence often intended to be profoundly humiliating), Utas and Jörgel 2008 (for an analysis on the use of extreme violence and unorthodox appearance as military tools) and Mitton 2013 (for an analysis on the violence as both irrational but inspired and utilised for rational ends).

likelihood of being used in renewed warfare. As Jaremeý McMullin has pointed out in his assessment of the discourse and practice of DDR in Liberia, for example, a threat narrative, which portrays ex-combatants as inherently and naturally threatening to post-conflict peace, dominates the debate on ex-combatants. Ex-combatants tend to be monitored and discussed in terms of how their disappointment could lead to renewed warfare, independent of other variables that could lead to war and independent of how this dissatisfaction of the ex-combatants might be linked to these other variables, McMullin argues. This produces a threat narrative in which the rationale for reintegration is not integration or reconciliation of post-war communities but rather the management and mitigation of ex-combatant threat, he finds. All ex-combatant activity is thereby monitored in terms of the risk it poses to war recurrence. As McMullin argues, the view of ex-combatants as such threats are anchored in the assumptions that ex-combatants are anti-social, lack education, ideology, political beliefs, are irrational, barbarically violent, apolitical, greedy and nihilistic. And, that after the end of war, ex-combatants are said to gravitate naturally towards criminal lives.²³³

The views held by fellow Liberian citizens also matter and impact the reality ex-combatants face. An example from neighbouring Sierra Leone, drawn by Catherine Bolten, illustrates this often tense and complex relationship between ex-combatants and communities at large. Bolten, conducting fieldwork in Makeni, noted that receiving communities found a way of accepting ex-combatants living among them, while at the same time refusing to incorporate them into the social order. NGO sensitisation training, aiming at getting civilians to accept ex-combatants as 'normal' men, was rendered a success since civilians and ex-combatants could live side by side without ex-combatants being harassed due to their background. Yet, as Bolten found, a quiet marginalisation of ex-combatants still existed. Ex-combatants were tolerated, but not seen as 'just ordinary men'. By refusing the ex-combatants this status, community members were protecting themselves and the youth of the society against the threat to social order that ex-combatants were seen to constitute. The ex-combatants were, according to Bolten's findings, seen as the vanguard of youth who disdain manual labour and elder control. And by quietly marginalising the ex-combatants both socially and economically, the

²³³ Jaremeý McMullin, "Integration or Separation? The Stigmatisation of Ex-Combatants after War", *Review of International Studies*, 39, 385-414, 2013.

community had found a strategy of not accepting the same behaviour among its civilian youth and thus protecting themselves against the threat to their social world that the ex-combatants were understood as posing.²³⁴ In this way, people's views and opinions of former combatants, even when they are only expressed quietly, away from large scale public confrontation, shape the public notion of an '*ex-combatant identity*' which is often intimately associated with negative characteristics.

Yet, although the ex-combatant identity is indeed problematic, or even dangerous, to hold on to, many ex-combatants still choose to do so. Godfrey Maringira found that ex-combatants in post-apartheid South Africa, have kept a 'militarised mind', both at individual and collective level despite the transition to democracy in 1994. The danger in this is lies in the ex-combatant's perception of the gun as an alternative avenue for making a living in a highly unequal and violent society, and as a way to redress the inequalities that have remained in many townships. But they also see the gun as a way to meet their families' and communities' expectations on them as providers and defenders, Maringira notes. These ex-combatants cling to their military skills and ability to do violence, which they view as a means to maintain social status, making a living, and protecting their families and communities, who often expect them to use violence and military skills to do so, in response to their perceived marginalisation by the state. At the same time, the ex-combatants also use the social networks emerging from their military identities to mobilise around community issues, Maringira found. For example, ex-combatants used their military skills to recruit youth involved in crime into development projects. Accordingly, identities forged during resistance and combat were reproduced in post-conflict society, Maringira noted, at times because the ex-combatants viewed their military identities as the only way to establish themselves or gain recognition as 'defenders' of the community or just as respectable community members. As Maringira argues, military identities are often viewed as sources of future violence, but they are also sources of recognition and status. To view such identities as purely violent, he claims, hides the fact that these identities are also productive in the community. How are we to expect ex-combatants to leave behind their military identity as they continue to be marginalised by the state and

²³⁴ Catherine Bolten, "'We Have Been Sensitized': Ex-Combatants, Marginalization, and Youth in Postwar Sierra Leone", *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 114, No. 3, pp. 496-508, 2012.

remain in violent neighbourhoods, and when their military identities also can allow the ex-combatants comparatively privileges in their communities, Maringira asks. Military identity provides a social framework in which the social network remains intact. In this way ex-combatants can mobilise each other to collectively meet challenges they face as a group.²³⁵ Accordingly, although the ex-combatant identity can be highly problematic, especially in the light of the negative perceptions attached to it, there can be good reasons for the ex-combatants' wanting to preserve it. As in the Liberian examples of this thesis, the ex-combatant identity can also be a valuable tool in a post-conflict society.

Turning the ex-combatant stigma into a positive brand?

However, as we have seen in the previous chapters, having a past as a rebel and a reputation as being capable of committing violence is something that can be turned into an advantage. The ex-combatant identity, even though to a limited extent and only in specific contexts, has been turned into if not a positive 'label', then at least a profitable one. Being part of a post-war rebel network, such a reputation can be the very factor that secures employment. Ex-combatants in such networks can use this part of the perceived characteristic of the ex-combatant identity in an advantageous way. It is, then, possible to turn a social stigma into a 'positive brand'. Jesper Bjarnesen has done fieldwork on 'Diaspo youth' – children of parents from Burkina Faso, who grew up in Côte d'Ivoire but who were forced to flee to their parents' country of origin during the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire. He shows how this group, which faced social stigmatisation as newcomers in Burkina Faso, partly due to their perceived association with the civil war, were able to turn this identity into a positive social marker. 'Diaspo' as these newcomers were called, was indeed a label initially ascribed to them by others as a negative stereotype but one that these young men and women now embrace as a positive label. Through what Bjarnesen refers to as a 'process of social branding' the Diaspo youth have been able to exploit their Ivorian upbringing to distinguish themselves from the competition. Many have succeeded in creating livelihood opportunities as traders, performers, radio hosts and other publicly profiled professions, Bjarnesen notes. And they have in fact been more

²³⁵ Godfrey Maringira with Jasmina Brankovic, "The Persistence of Military Identities among Ex-Combatants in South Africa", *Violence and Transition Project*, Centre for Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Centre for Humanities Research, 2013.

successful than local youths.²³⁶ By not hiding their past or by trying to blend in, the Diaspo youth embraced their Ivorian backgrounds by publicly displaying what is believed to be a specific Ivorian way of talking, dressing or even acting in public spaces. This performance provoked resentment in urban Burkina Faso but also inspired admiration. And more importantly, in an environment of scarce employment opportunities the 'Diaspo identity' has also opened doors.²³⁷

Relating this to the former fighters of Liberia who have also been objects of social stigmatisation due to the negative perceptions of the ex-combatant identity, we should note, as we have seen many examples of in this thesis, that they have also been successful in turning their stigma into something positive, at least when it comes to finding employment. Networks of ex-combatants are, despite the many negative assumptions, also believed to be hard working, well organised and disciplined. Considering how hard it is for any Liberian to find employment and secure their livelihood, the ex-combatants have had considerable advantages when it comes to paid employment within the security arena – an arena we also need to remember is intimately connected to the real centre of power in Liberia. Here the ex-combatants are considered to be the most reliable when it comes to getting the job done. The ex-combatant identity in this specific context has thereby been turned into a positive label in the sense that this group is considered to have acquired the qualities, experiences, networks but also mind-set for certain types of assignments. The negative perceptions of former rebels still have significant consequences for how they lead their lives in post-war Liberia. What it means to live with an “ex-combatant identity” in contemporary Liberia has of course as many answers as there are former rebels in the country. Yet all of those who have chosen or have been forced to reveal their rebel past are bound to face the, often very negative, perceptions of what it means to be an ex-combatant. In the subsequent sections we will follow a few individuals for whom the ex-combatant identity, for better and worse, shapes their everyday life.

²³⁶ Jesper Bjarnesen, “Social Branding in Urban Burkina Faso”, in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 23 (2): 83-99, 2014.

²³⁷ Ibid.

Where are the women? – The ex-combatant identity from a gendered perspective²³⁸

It is difficult to know exactly how many they were, and numbers differ. But we do know that women constituted a significant part of combatants in the Liberian civil wars. According to some estimates, young female fighters comprised about thirty to forty per cent of all the fighting forces in the country.²³⁹ Yet, within the post-war rebel networks – the vigilante and informal security groups I have followed over the years – women have been absent. Given the high number of women active as combatants during the war, this is remarkable. The question is thus: why do the numbers of women in post-war rebel networks not at all correspond to the numbers of female fighters in the Liberian wars?

It is unquestionably so that the ex-combatant identity has functioned through post-war rebel networks as a way, and for many the only way, to secure jobs in post-war Liberia, if only temporarily. Yet, being identifiable as an ex-combatant can be a very difficult experience, as opinions about their morals and presumed violent nature are not something they can easily escape. But ex-combatants active in post-war rebel networks live with this predicament. They live with the negative aspects of not hiding their ex-combatant identity because they appear to value the benefits of their post-war rebel network higher. So why are most of them men? Could it be so that women are simply not let in? That women are not seen fit to work alongside men on the informal security assignments, which post-war rebel networks are often recruited for? Given the fact that women took part in active combat in such high numbers during the wars, this does not seem likely. I would suggest that the ex-combatant identity in itself, due to gender perceptions, could be a heavier burden for women than for men, causing female ex-combatants to downplay their wartime past by not attaching themselves to post-war rebel networks, despite the benefits these connections might have brought with them.

²³⁸ The crucial role of women in war is easily forgotten when conflict analyses lack a gender perspective. The groundbreaking researcher Cynthia Enloe has inspired scholars in the field of political science and beyond to always simply ask 'where are the women?' in the study of politics and war. In her book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases – Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, from 1989 Enloe was one of the first to look for women in the real landscape of international politics. Inspired by this way of thinking in this chapter I investigate the apparent lack of women in post-war rebel networks in Liberia.

²³⁹ See for example: Abu Sherif, "Reintegration of female war-affected and ex-combatants in Liberia", *Accord - Conflict Trends*, Issue 3, 2008, p. 26.

In order to understand what an ex-combatant identity would imply for women in post-war Liberia, and why such an identity could have different consequences for women than for men, an important starting point is to understand how female combatants are perceived *during* war, and in this specific conflict context. This is not, however, a straightforward task. Although the attention to women and girls who actively participate in armed conflicts in Africa has increased significantly in recent decades, women, despite extensive research and documentation, are largely absent from mainstream studies and in most policy programming. Female fighters, if mentioned at all, are often seen as an anomaly, as it is often implied that women and girls instead are predominately 'victims', while male fighters are uniformly described as 'combatants' or alternatively 'perpetrators'.²⁴⁰ Women's multifaceted and complex roles in fighting forces, especially those of combatants, rarely receive the attention they ought to, considering how common this phenomenon is. Why, then, are women's active roles, especially as fighters, often ignored? Part of the explanation can be found in prevalent gender stereotypes and notions of what women and men are, and ought to be, and do, in wars. Generalised images of masculinity and femininity, portraying men as aggressive and women as peaceful; men as active and women as passive, are often associated with war. This polarisation is, however, far from unproblematic. Not only is the image of the aggressive male a stereotype, but more importantly, the notion of conflict and aggression as something inherently male is an effective way to conceal how women are affected by, and actively participate in, violent conflicts and wars as combatants.²⁴¹

In the same way as gender stereotypes in mainstream thinking of war effectively conceal women's multifaceted roles in violent conflict, and especially those of frontline fighters, the same stereotypes of women as merely passive and peaceful could cause the women who actually are recognised as combatants and rebel soldiers to be regarded as completely deviant. When peace arrives, female ex-fighters are often looked upon with suspicion and fear

²⁴⁰ Chris Coulter, Mariam Persson and Mats Utas, "Young Women in African Wars", in Ed., Maria Eriksson Baaz and Mats Utas, "Beyond 'Gender and Stir' – Reflections on gender and SSR in the aftermath of African conflicts", The Nordic Africa Institute, *Policy Dialogue*, No. 9, 2012, p. 63.

²⁴¹ Coulter, Chris, Mariam Persson and Mats Utas, "Young Female Fighters in African Wars – Conflict and its consequences", The Nordic Africa Institute, *Policy Dialogue*, No. 3, 2008, p. 5.

for having been perpetrators of violence but also for having violated established gender roles.²⁴² Accordingly, women, violate taboos to a much higher degree than male combatants ever could, just by being combatants. As pointed out by McKay and Mazurana, analysing the situation for girl ex-combatants in Northern Uganda, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone, having been a girl in a fighting force was found to be an acute source of shame. The feeling of shame is a complex and powerful phenomenon, which is not only poorly understood and acknowledged at the cultural level, its gendered dimensions are often even less recognized.²⁴³ In short, having been a combatant can be a source of shame for both men and women. Yet, due to gender norms, this shame is bound to affect men and women differently, and female ex-combatants are at risk of being stigmatised to an even higher degree than male ex-combatants.

All societies have different gender norms, and female former rebels are faced with different challenges and realities when it comes to issues of post-war shame and stigmatisation, depending on the specific local context. When it comes to Liberia, there is a lack of in-depth research on the situation of female combatants during and after war. There are some policy reports with specific focus on women and girls within fighting forces, but they emphasis those who did not participate directly in actual combat during the war. Other reports concentrate on female combatants' experiences with the Liberian DDDR process in particular. But surprisingly little thorough research can be found on the lives of Liberian women and girl fighters during war and post-war, and the challenges faced in this specific local context. Accordingly, we cannot easily draw conclusions as to why so few women can be found in post-war rebel networks in Liberia.

More in-depth research on female combatants can be found in the case of neighbouring Sierra Leone. And even though generalisations often are problematic, the situation for these women and girls can give us important clues to understanding the lives and experiences of Liberian

²⁴² Ibid., p. 35.

²⁴³ Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, "Where are the Girls? – Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War", *Rights and Democracy*, 2004, p. 44.

female fighters, as the wars in the countries were so closely connected. Chris Coulter's research from 2006 and 2009 on what happened to rebel women during and after war in Sierra Leone provides comprehensive analyses on female combatants. Sierra Leonean women themselves articulate their experiences of war, specifically in relation to how they were seen by their families, communities and the international community post-war.²⁴⁴ Coulter found that female rebels in Sierra Leone were often regarded by the civilian population as monsters, barbarians, and more cold-blooded than male rebels. She relates such interpretations of women engaged in active combat to the notion of militarised masculinity and the stereotype of a male soldier, arguing that it was costly for Sierra Leonean women who deviated from acceptable feminine behaviour and who opposed female stereotypes in times of war and conflict.²⁴⁵

My own research, although conducted on a smaller scale, among young female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone two years after peace officially was declared, supports this picture. The young women I met felt deeply stigmatised due to their past as violent rebel soldiers in a way they argued their male comrades never experienced. For them to be viewed as ex-combatants was extremely shameful, and many did what they could to hide their past.²⁴⁶ When it came to the official post-conflict reconstruction initiatives in Sierra Leone, women and girls were often excluded from DDR programmes because they, incorrectly, were not seen as 'real' soldiers. Megan Mackenzie similarly found fear of stigmatisation to be one of the reasons why female ex-combatants themselves decided not to participate in the official reintegration process. Their association with programmes for former rebels would imply being continually identified with the conflict. This was not an option for many women, who feared for their safety if they were seen publicly as ex-combatants.²⁴⁷ Female fighters were also found to hide away from the DDR process in the Liberian case, partly due to fear of social exclusion if they revealed their ex-combatant status.²⁴⁸ As seen from the experiences of my informants, living publicly

²⁴⁴ See Chris Coulter, "Being a Bush Wife – Women's Lives through War and Peace in Northern Sierra Leone", PhD thesis, Uppsala University, 2006, and *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers – Women's lives through war and peace in Sierra Leone*, Cornell University Press, 2009.

²⁴⁵ Coulter, 2009, p. 14.

²⁴⁶ Mariam Persson 2005.

²⁴⁷ Megan H. MacKenzie, *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone – Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development*, New York University Press, 2012, pp. 90-91.

²⁴⁸ Irma Specht, *Red Shoes – Experiences of Girl-combatants in Liberia*, International Labour Office (ILO) Geneva, 2006, p. 88.

with one's ex-combatant identity, like individuals within post-war rebel networks do, does not come without its problems. There are numerous disadvantages to being identified as an ex-combatant in post-war Liberia. The men within the post-war rebel networks I have followed have chosen this path despite its difficulties. For female ex-combatants it is likely that the same decision, to cling on to the ex-combatant identity, would have been a too high a price to pay. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss how the ex-combatant identities of informants that we are already familiar with from previous chapters handled the expectations and prejudice held towards them by the surrounding community.

Perceptions of crime, security, 'anarchic' neighbourhoods and Liberian ex-combatants

- ***Abraham – a violent ex-combatant in notorious West Point or an ordinary hardworking Liberian citizen?***

I struggle to keep up with Alex today. He is walking briskly, and Will²⁴⁹ and I have to hurry along the narrow alleyways between the small zinc houses and sheds not to lose sight of him. We have to squeeze ourselves between women cooking for their families, children playing in the small open spaces and chasing each other between the houses. I apologise for being in the way and for just walking in where women are preparing food, people are having their meals or taking a rest. Most people just give me friendly smiles back and continue with their business. A few look a bit surprised to see a stranger there but most do not bother at all. I try to focus on where Alex is going so he won't have to wait for us on every corner, but I haven't seen Will in a long time, and we get caught up in our conversation as usual, so Alex patiently has to wait. Alex turns left and right along narrow paths between the cramped houses. I turn to Will and joke about whether Alex actually knows where he is going. Will laughs and admits that he has no idea where we are either. But Alex knows his way around here. He used to live here for some years just after the war. For me West Point is still a maze. I have only been in this community a few times since I first started to visit Monrovia some years ago. Situated on a peninsula jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean this township of the Liberian capital isn't a place one often just passes by without any particular errand. However, as I'm doing research on post-war rebel networks, it was in fact a bit strange that my research had not brought me to this township

²⁴⁹ In order to protect the identities of my informants Will's real name will not be used in this thesis.

more often in the past, judging from its reputation of being inhabited by large number of ex-combatants. But my informants had been residing elsewhere. I had only recently begun to spend more time in West Point.

Alex (introduced in the previous chapter) and Will, two young men who used to spend their nights as vigilantes when I first got to know them a few years back, had introduced me to a friend of theirs who lived in West Point. I still could not find the way to Abraham's house on my own so I was happy to have Alex and Will keeping me company. Will and I talked about West Point's unenviable reputation. The rumours of this notorious neighbourhood would not pass anyone by unnoticed. West Point is desperately poor with few employment opportunities. It is heavily overcrowded and the water and sanitation situation is catastrophic. People face tremendous challenges in this township. Still there is something about how West Point and its inhabitants are being portrayed that I found very disturbing. Browsing the internet for articles and reportage on West Point you do not have to look for too long until you find the township described as a society completely lost to anarchy, crime and violence with inhabitants portrayed mainly as drug-abusing ex-combatants making their money on drug dealing, prostitution and armed robbery.

A few years ago a Swedish newspaper decided to portray Liberia and West Point in the same kind of manner. In an article describing Liberia as "hell on earth", "where murder, rape drugs and AIDS is everyone's everyday life", the newspaper drew attention, and posted a link, to what the filmmakers themselves called a 'documentary'. But the "The Vice Guide to Liberia" was far from a nuanced documentation of Liberia and West Point. Instead of trying to understand post-war Liberia, and the situation of ex-combatants and others living in West Point and other impoverished areas, the TV team ran around Liberia in search of sensational news on 'cannibal warlords', teenage prostitutes and drug-abusing children. The film was appalling. My colleagues, Mats Utas and Ilmari Käihkö, and I decided to write a response.²⁵⁰ In

²⁵⁰ Mats Utas, Mariam Persson and Ilmari Käihkö, "Varning för Aftonbladets Jackass journalistik i "det mörkaste Afrika"", *Newsmill*, Available at: <http://www.newsmill.se/artikel/2010/03/31/forskare-varning-for-aftonbladets-jackass-journalistik-i-det-morkaste-afrika>

the article, which we called “Jackass Journalism in darkest Africa” (after the famous TV show “Jackass”), we argued for how the media generally present Africa and African conflict-related issues in an extremely stereotypical way. We suggested that the so-called documentary was a ‘worst case’ example of this. The film team was fleeing from one scene to another, acting like their very lives were in danger. What they actually were running from was less clear. Provoking, rather than interviewing, prostitutes and drug-affected residents, they seemed to have no understanding of the chaos they themselves were creating with their cameras, intrusive ways and lack of respect as they hunted for sensational stories in West Point late at night. Without knowledge of cultural codes or context, the reporters nervously laughed in front of the camera, proud to have dared to do reportage like this. Their combination of fear and excitement was evident. They had found what they wanted to portray, a neighbourhood in total anarchy, chaos without any logic.

Even though he is used to it, Abraham²⁵¹ always gets a bit annoyed when the negative image of West Point is brought up. He finds it unfair. Yes, West Point is poor, and crime is a problem, but we’re not all bad people here, he often argues. Abraham is an ex-combatant.²⁵² And he is a resident of West Point. From time to time he makes a bit of extra money working as an informal security provider. His latest assignment was for the CDC party, as he was mobilised during the elections, like so many other ex-combatants. Alex had been the one employing him. And just like Alex he had worked for Tubman during his campaigning already in 2005 for the previous elections. But Abraham is also a father of six. He is married and he makes his living from petty trading. This day we spend the morning outside Abraham’s little zinc house, Abraham, Alex, Will and I. The house nextdoor is so close to Abraham’s that I can touch it if I just lean forward and reach out my arm. Some of the children passing by laugh a little when they see me. One little boy gets so frightened when he looks at me that he cries in panic and refuses to walk by. I do not look Liberian, and it scares him. But other than that, my visit does not cause too much attention. Abraham’s wife and daughters are preparing food nearby, and his younger children are playing and running errands for their mother. Sometimes they come

²⁵¹ In order to protect the identities of my informants Abraham’s real name will not be used in this thesis.

²⁵² This section is based on fieldwork in the Monrovia neighbourhood West Point and personal communication with Abraham during February and March 2013.

closer to listen in on our discussions but they quickly get bored and run off to play again. I cannot help but think of the images of the VBS documentary when I'm here. Everyday life is so far removed from the violent chaos the filmmakers wanted to portray.

We talk about security, about crime and violence and the perception of West Point. Abraham is not particularly afraid in his neighbourhood. He has lived there for a long time, and he knows his neighbours. But he is careful. He lives in a house with no windows. Will laughs at that: he cannot believe why anyone would want to live in a house like that! But Abraham is persistent. With no windows there can be no unexpected visits in the night. And theft at night is still an issue. But break-ins and theft are obviously not phenomena isolated to West Point. Crime happens everywhere, Abraham often points out. In fact, my informants somewhat ironically argue that parts of West Point are safer than many other areas of Monrovia, not despite its poverty but because of it. 'You know the criminals, they live here, so of course they don't want to commit the crimes in their own community: that would cause them too many problems!' Abraham and Alex argue. And it somehow makes sense. Here housing is affordable, even for those who have the least, making it likely that people engaged in theft due to lack of other economic opportunities would live here. And why risk being caught in your own community?

Nevertheless, crime is a problem in West Point, and theft seems to be what people are most worried about. Yet there is, if not an acceptance, then at least an understanding of those who engage in theft that I find interesting. People in West Point often saw theft as something young men and women were driven to due to lack of legal ways of making a living. Some of my informants even talked about theft as a form of business. The inhabitants did what they could to protect themselves against theft, but most Liberians I knew had been affected, at least on a small scale. Money being stolen from someone's bag during an unobservant moment, or a mobile phone being snatched from someone's pocket was not unusual. But in West Point, as in many other parts of Monrovia, what was stolen could most often be bought back, and that was what the business side of theft was all about. People in the area knew where to turn if they found that some of their belongings had been stolen. Those engaged in this type of criminal activity often worked in networks, linked to an area leader. So when things were

stolen, people turned to the leader, who often had received the item shortly after it had been taken. It was not unlikely that the person who had been affected could then buy the item back for a small amount of money. A young woman I knew told me about her grandfather who had had the misfortune of having USD 100 (a large amount of money for a poor Liberian) stolen from his pocket. Luckily enough he later the same day successfully negotiated to buy back the same money for 5 USD from the gang leader to whom the money had been brought. More often these negotiations took place over stolen mobile phones or other material items. But as seen from this example, even stolen money could return to the owner for a reasonable sum following this system. People were obviously enraged when they realised they had been stolen from, and no one liked to have to negotiate and buy their own belongings back. Yet, if not tolerated, even those affected appeared to have an understanding of theft as unavoidable in the absence of employment opportunities. In this respect, West Point was far from a community lost to anarchy, as it is so often portrayed. Although this did not always apply, even theft could be seen to follow codes of morality, a system of social order and a logic people could understand.

Sasha Newell found a similar logic, or what he calls 'a moral economy of theft' in a poor neighbourhood in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. After the experience of being robbed himself, during an incident where he was not accompanied by his informants as he usually was when visiting the neighbourhood, Newell came to realise how theft was ruled by relationships of exchange and obligation and that social relationships were prioritised over financial gain. Newell's being robbed set in motion a chain reaction in the neighbourhood among the inhabitants who wished to protect the reputation of their street and set off a process of retribution that brought extensive social networks into motion, Newell describes. The Treichville community, where Newell conducted his research on lower-class urban youth – their sources of income, social formations, relationship to the state and other authorities etc. – was structured around a moral economy of theft, he found. The social interpretations of the crime are forms of exchange, which define social relations. Within this anti-social activity of expropriation lies a

moral system built upon social networks on which the thief depends for survival. Theft in this community, and probably elsewhere, is thereby part of the social organisation itself.²⁵³

The Treichville community largely depends economically on criminal activity. A criminal network holds the centre of the local economy and supplies the principal commodities of informal exchange through theft. The activities of this network complement a second group, the larger majority of people who in varying degrees are involved with the informal economy through illicit dealings, called *bizness*, by Ivoirians. *Bizness* can encompass activities such as selling stolen goods as middlemen for the criminal network or relatively harmless activities like selling minutes on a mobile phone under a false account. However, regardless of what kind of *bizness* activity people are involved in, they depend ultimately upon the criminal network for the supply of stolen goods, as well as protection from the police and from other thieves, Newell argues.²⁵⁴ Yet, the same people involved in these criminal activities angrily defend themselves against theft. Thieves caught in the act of stealing can be killed by violent mobs. Herein lies a paradox, Newell notes, that within a society where the majority of the population is involved, at least indirectly, in criminal activities, residents maintain a system of justice regulating this very behaviour, and crime is still considered as something bad. It is therefore more useful to look at crimes as particular events, each of which people interpret according to the social relationships involved.

The collective interpretation of a crime, Newell notes, is dependent on the relationship of the criminal and the victim, but more importantly on the social networks to which both parties belong. Morality, Newell finds, is relative to social belonging, which implies that thieves are not treated equally, as not all thieves are equally estranged.²⁵⁵ Newell's being robbed thereby became a complex issue. He could be seen both as an insider and an outsider. He was not an inhabitant, still he somewhat belonged to the community due to his close connections with his informants. But even though he was an insider by proxy as Newell himself describes his

²⁵³ Sasha Newell, "Estranged belongings: A moral economy of theft in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire", *Anthropological Theory*, 2006; 6; 179, p. 181.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-187.

position, the social pressure to protect those who had robbed him in the end became more important. As Newell concludes, stealing from a stranger is an acceptable and, for many people, also a laudable enterprise. To merely steal from the occasional European businessman would thereby be the optimal solution for inhabitants in communities such as Treichville, but Newell found that the majority of thefts seemed to take place within the community itself. People could resort to theft from their closest friends. Yet this was often done with relative impunity, since it would be a graver act of betrayal to endanger the life of one's friend by denouncing the person as a thief than the actual theft itself.²⁵⁶

There are many similarities between the community described by Newell and that of West Point as illustrated by my informants in many stories on crime and of those regarded as criminals – and ex-combatants are often assumed to belong to this category, both in West Point and elsewhere in Liberia – but at the same time they are also as accepted community members. However, I would argue that one of the most important lessons to draw from Newell's example and that of West Point is that societies assumed to be anarchic due to poverty, criminality and inhabitants with a violent past such as ex-combatants instead are likely to be governed by a complex social order which is far from chaotic. Furthermore, it is important to always bear in mind that neighbourhood security and people's perceptions of how safe a neighbourhood really is, do not necessarily correspond, even though they are most likely to affect one and other. For instance, in his discussion on security and violence in Nkomazi, South Africa, Steffen Jensen distinguishes between two forms of security. On the one hand, there is the material side of security, in other words the extent to which the population is the victim of crime and violence, which can be analysed by surveys and statistics. The other side of security, however, is discursive and consists in how people talk about security. Concerns about crime can rise without it having anything to do with the actual reported crime levels, illustrating how security and security threats are defined by power relations and by people's perceptions. As Jensen argues, the relation between physical violence and security discourses is complex. Nkomazi is an area where police are less than effective and where the inhabitants are often left to deal with violence and criminals themselves. Various formations claim to be representing the community and protecting it against crime. A moral community is produced and established by eradicating the area of

²⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 189-190.

crime – and those identified to belong to the moral community may shift dramatically depending on which individuals or groups currently manage to curb crime. Violence plays a complex role in the constitution of moral communities, Jensen notes: it must be prevented in order for the moral community to materialise, on the one hand, while it is paradoxically the very means used in the realisation of the moral community, on the other hand.²⁵⁷

Two important lessons applicable to the case of West Point can be drawn from Jensen's South African example. Firstly, the actual security situation in West Point cannot be judged based merely on people's (inhabitants, other Liberian, the international community etc.) perceptions of security in the neighbourhood. Thus, how people perceive security and the actual crime levels do not necessarily correspond. For example, a research report conducted on security and environment in West Point from 2012 concluded that West Point's reputation as a "criminal safe haven" and "home to bad people" greatly contrasted with the experiences of the research team, who found that the stigmatisation did not seem to respond to any empirical evidence.²⁵⁸ This point might be obvious, but it is striking how often West Point is portrayed as a particularly insecure area without the statements being based on more than people's perceptions. Yet one should not underestimate the significance of reputation. If a neighbourhood and its inhabitants are constantly stigmatised as particularly violent, this is likely to have important consequences. The feeling of being insecure in West Point, whether this feeling is based on real facts or not, will surely affect people's lives in the area, as they risk both living in fear for crime and violence and being stigmatised themselves as violent, crime-prone, unpredictable citizens.

A second point relevant for the situation in West Point that can be drawn from Jensen's analysis is how violence always must be understood in its own specific context. Violence, carried out by informal security groups such as vigilantes, can be an integral part of a

²⁵⁷ Steffen Jensen, "Security and violence on the frontier of the state", in Ed. Paul Ahluwalia, Louise Bethlehem and Ruth Ginio, *Violence and Non-Violence in Africa*, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp. 105-106.

²⁵⁸ Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Working Group "Security, Environment and Opportunities in West Point – A community led Urban Early-Warning and Empowerment Project", (Action on Armed Violence, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Liberia Peace Building Office, Youth Crime Watch, Humanity United and Trust Africa), 2012, p. 4.

community's response to crime in the absence of functioning formal security providers.²⁵⁹ Such violence, when it does occur, can therefore not simply be reduced to an evidence of the 'anarchic' state of the neighbourhood but could in fact bear evidence of the opposite as merely a different kind of social order.

I have only just begun to get to know West Point and some of its inhabitants. No one can deny how desperately poor the township is, how hard people struggle just to get by on a daily basis and how crime and lack of social services constantly affect people's lives. West Point is a complex society, with inhabitants from all kinds of backgrounds in a variety of life situations. Some were fighters during the wars, but many were not. Still, the Liberian civil wars not too long ago cast a shadow over the lives of the residents in this community, as they do over so many other citizens of Liberia. West Point is many things, yet it is far from its stereotypical image as a place of mere chaos, anarchy and violence. Chaos is something we tend to see when we do not understand how things work. Chaos is what we think we witness when we forget to take the time to listen to people's stories, and let fear and excitement lead us in our hunt for sensational war stories. There is no lack of social order in West Point, but it does follow a different logic. Even theft, which at a first glance could be seen to indicate chaos and disorder, often follows a comprehensible pattern. The high number of ex-combatant residents has contributed to the unenviable reputation of West Point. And yes, ex-combatants do take part in the networks involved in theft and robberies in the area. However, many of the ex-combatants were also part of the informal security networks of the area, vigilante groups that protected the township against crime when the state and formal security apparatus had failed to do so. It is this complexity we so often fail to see and describe. Abraham is a man with a violent past. He is a poor resident of West Point. He is a man who lives in a small zinc house with seven other people, with no windows, running water or electricity. But Abraham is also a man who devotes his life to his family, who struggles hard to pay his daughters' school fees, who has high hopes and dreams that his youngest son might become a politician one day, and who is annoyed with his oldest son for having so much that he himself never had growing up

²⁵⁹ Findings within the research report referred to above conducted by the EWER Working Group support this as community members of West Point in their surveys were overwhelmingly positive towards the area's vigilante and community defence groups as they were seen to be plugging gaps in the formal security system. See EWER Working Group 2012, p. 31.

– such as two pairs of shoes, a decent house, and the opportunity to complete his schooling, without appreciating it. This too is everyday life in West Point, for ex-combatants and others.

Afterthoughts – West Point and the Ebola epidemic

It should be noted that this chapter on life in West Point was written before the tragic outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in 2014. Liberia, together with Sierra Leone, has been in the very epicentre of this Ebola epidemic. West Point has also been deeply affected, both in terms of the high numbers of people infected but also when it comes to how the neighbourhood and its inhabitants have been portrayed in the media as well as treated by the national government. In a desperate bid to stop the spread of the deadly disease, the Liberian government placed West Point under quarantine. The quarantine came to have serious consequences. First of all, it did not stop people from moving in and out of the township, despite the heavily armed military presence guarding the entrances. The large-scale quarantine was unmanageable, and bribes were also used to move in and out. Secondly, the quarantine immediately led to the eruption of violent clashes, as inhabitants of West Point felt seriously threatened by the government's actions. Rumours of Ebola-infected patients from other parts of Liberia being transferred to West Point flourished. Prices on food and basic goods doubled, causing living conditions for the already poor inhabitants to deteriorate further. The quarantine only lasted little more than a week, but in reports West Point was once again reduced to nothing more than an anarchic neighbourhood of violent inhabitants refusing to cooperate in the efforts to control the epidemic. Less was said about the inhabitants' rational suspicion of the government's action and lack of information on why these actions were taken. As Susan Shepler pointed out during the Ebola crisis and the most intensive period of media coverage of Liberia, a main part of the news was on the "heroic health workers and the ignorant locals" – an ignorance Shepler strongly disputed. As Shepler pointed out, the crisis only revealed Liberians' general sense of mistrust of the state. People do not just ignore public health warnings because they doubt they would get the acquired assistance when needed, they actually believe that the state is out to get them. More precisely, as Shepler puts it, they believe that 'big men' are using the apparatus of the state to enrich themselves at the expense, of ordinary people, sometimes even costing them their

lives. One rumour had it that the health ministry had a chemical spray they could use against people in order to increase the numbers of Ebola-infected people and deaths, and thereby receive more international donations for the government. As Shepler concludes, the rumours cannot be seen as ignorance but must instead be understood in the light of how the state has acted in the past, and that is in a “vampiric” fashion, feeding of the misery of the people. People are thereby not responding out of ignorance, but out of experience.²⁶⁰ What regardless can be concluded once again, this time from how the Ebola crisis in West Point particularly was treated locally as well as portrayed in international media, is that the will to understand the intentions and living conditions of inhabitants of such a notorious neighbourhood in general weigh much less than the news value West Point continues to have if described as violent, incomprehensible and anarchic.

Surviving peace despite the ex-combatant identity, or because of it?

- *Malcolm’s story – wanting out, but needing to be in*

“Are you sure you don’t want to sit inside”, Malcolm²⁶¹ asks, looking a bit worried when we take a seat on a wooden bench outside his house. The sun is broiling over Vai Town and Monrovia today, and for now Malcolm has electricity so he offers to turn on the fan in little room of not quite ten square meters, which is his home for the time being. I assure him that the shade will do just fine, knowing it would be rather difficult to have a discussion with Malcolm and his neighbours inside his small home. Malcolm has done his best to decorate his home with his limited means. He has painted the concrete walls in a bright blue colour and covered them with posters, mostly of hip hop artists. There is a mattress on the floor under a mosquito net, a chair and some shelves with his belongings. The room has a window facing the courtyard where families residing in the building prepare their food, but wooden boards cover it from the inside, and a big padlock is used to secure the wooden door at night or when Malcolm is out. For now, Malcolm lives in this room for free. A few years ago there had been a lot of break-ins in this and the neighbouring buildings, and that was how Malcolm came to

²⁶⁰ Susan Shepler, “The Ebola virus and the vampire state”, July, 21, 2014, available at: <https://matsutas.wordpress.com/2014/07/21/the-ebola-virus-and-the-vampire-state-by-susan-shepler/>

²⁶¹ In order to protect the identities of my informants Malcolm’s real name will not be used in this thesis.

move in. Malcolm had been renting another room from the same landlord in a nearby building at the time, but the landlord knew Malcolm's background as a rebel, and that he still was involved in the security business, and offered Malcolm to stay in the room for free as long as he kept a vigilant eye on the buildings of the courtyard. It had worked. The break-ins had decreased and Malcolm had somewhere to stay. Here he felt secure. Break-ins still occurred from time to time, and even Malcolm himself had been affected, "but what can you do", Malcolm reasoned. He, like his neighbours, did his best to protect himself against crime, and his past as a combatant at least had an intimidating effect on criminals, he thought.

But Malcolm was tired of the whole 'security business' he told me: he wanted out. He was forty years old, and he had been living with the consequences of putting his life at risk for more than half his lifetime. At the age of seventeen, Malcolm had joined the NPFL in 1990. He eventually became a commander with more and more responsibilities. Following Taylor's election victory in 1997, the Taylor administration created the Special Security Unit (SSU), a unit initially intended for direct protection of the president and his family. Malcolm received six months' training before being transferred from Taylor's rebel force to the new official Liberian security unit. In 1999, after an additional training period of nine months, Malcolm came to join the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), the notorious paramilitary force led by the son of Taylor – Chuckie Taylor – consisting of many experienced fighters from the NPFL. Within the ATU Malcolm came to fight the LURD during the second Liberian civil war up until the peace agreement had been signed in 2003. Using his network from the war, Malcolm managed to get a position within Winston Tubman's security force prior to the presidential elections in 2005. He was hired again for the 2011 elections as a one of the informal security commanders. But if Malcolm had had any hopes of gaining an official employment, it died with Ellen Johnson's victory at the polls.

Today Malcolm survives day by day by taking on minor informal security assignments. He can be called in to organise security for a football match, a music concert, a beauty contest or some other event in Monrovia. When he is put in charge as the security organiser, he uses his post-war rebel network to gather ex-combatants for the assignment. But Malcolm is tired of

this way of living; he is tired of the whole security business he says. It is too hard and too risky to do on a permanent basis. After fourteen years in war you grow tired of living the way you do when you live by the gun, he tells me. There are two things, he says, two things that occupy your mind when you live like that. “If you live by the gun you constantly think about people wanting to kill you. Even when you sleep. You live with your gun and you are suspicious of everyone.” “The second thing you think every day”, he continues, “is that you will always return home. You never think of dying. You think that everybody around you can die. But you will never. You will return home. You have to develop that mind-set to survive”. But he says he cannot do it anymore. He is tired of it. Life as an ex-combatant also implies living with the memories of a violent past, memories of the violence you have seen, the violence you have suffered and the violence you have caused. Malcolm lives with these thoughts every day. He says that he is not suffering from nightmares or anxiety from guilt. The war was a time when people did what they had to. But when I once asked him if he did what he did because he felt he was forced, Malcolm shook his head. He does not see it in that way. He says, “You don’t force a man to do some of the things I did. I was a commander, and no one had to force me. But things were different back then. It was a different time...”

Malcolm’s ex-combatant identity has given him the opportunity to survive post-war through private security work. While it is not the same as risking his life – or the lives of others – at war, it is still a dangerous line of work, and he does not want to live his life like that anymore, and he does not want to survive by thinking the very same thoughts that got him through all those years of war. But this is the only opportunity an ex-combatant like him can get, he says. What secures his livelihood are his post-war rebel networks – his ATU network that meets from time to time and other constellations – as well as his ex-combatant identity and people knowing what he did and who he was, whether he wants it or not.²⁶²

²⁶² This section has been written based on several conversations with Malcolm particularly during February and March 2013, but was also based on discussions we had in September and October 2011 and April 2012, Monrovia, Liberia.

- ***Jacob's story – "they know my name, and they fear me"***²⁶³

If there ever was a winning and a losing side when the war finally came to an end in 2003, Jacob was definitely among the losers. Jacob (as introduced in chapter two) had been forced to change sides after years in prison following the Camp Johnson incident in 1998. Charles Taylor, as the new Liberian president, had offered him the chance to take his side in the war against LURD. For Jacob, this meant he would at war against not only people he had fought and lived with for years, but also people he saw as his closest family and friends. But Jacob had seen no other way than to accept Taylor's offer. But when peace came, not only was the leader he had been forced to follow driven into exile, leaving his men with no benefits, Jacob was also locked out from his most important network, the post-war rebel network that came to take control over a significant part of the Liberian rubber industry through the occupation of Guthrie rubber plantation. Jacob's ex-combatant identity has both offered opportunities and been a heavy burden, as it has for all of my informants. But for Jacob this identity has perhaps been even more complex to live with than for many other ex-combatants. Many people knew of his past, and viewed him with suspicion, and he was even viewed with suspicion by members of his own post-war rebel network.

Jacob lives in a small house in Gardnersville, a Monrovia suburb, with his two young daughters and his mother. The only reason Jacob has been able to build a house of his own was the fact that Taylor gave him money, as he was made to turn on his former allies. Building a house was the very first thing Jacob did after having been forced to accept Taylor's offer. Jacob had tears in his eyes the first time he told me about his house. Jacob knew that Taylor could turn on him any second. That he could kill him and take his money back as he saw fit. But after years in war, followed by years in prison, Jacob needed something to remain after he was gone. If he was killed tomorrow, Jacob thought, a house could be something to leave behind for his family, somewhat like a symbol or a proof even that he once had lived, and thought of them. Giving his mother the money to start arranging for the house was therefore the very first thing Jacob did.

²⁶³ This section has been written based on several conversations with Jacob during February and March 2013, Monrovia, Liberia.

The first years following the peace were frustrating for Jacob. While his closest friends and family were making lucrative deals on their illegal plantation occupation²⁶⁴, Jacob was never fully trusted with the plantation business. The plantation commanders, his best friend and his own cousin, gave him small amounts of money from time to time and helped him to get temporary informal security assignments through their contacts, but the plantation business was closed to him. Making a living has been a daily struggle for Jacob, and like other ex-combatants who cannot or have chosen not to hide their wartime past, he has survived by taking on the various informal or private security assignments he has been able to get. But Jacob's ex-combatant identity has not only given him access to security assignments; it has more often than not kept him away from such jobs. Over the years Jacob has applied for several different governmental security jobs but his applications are not even assessed he says. He is an ex-combatant, and he will never be fully accepted back in society, he argues.

Jacob's achievements in war – how he managed to become a commander close to the rebel leader George Boley; a police commander following the first war; and then finally one of Taylor's presidential mansion commanders – have made him someone who is easily recognised, at least within the formal and informal Liberian security arena. "They know my name, and they fear me", Jacob once told me. He had become notorious during his time as a rebel, especially during those years based in Monrovia as one of George Boley's main commanders. He became fearless, he says. He almost lost the ability to be afraid, he recalls, because he simply could not afford to think in that way. "I will die one day, but a lot of people will have to die by my hand before that happens", he used to think to himself. Jacob became known and feared in Monrovia. He developed a reputation, a reputation he has not escaped post-war. Furthermore, as previously discussed, Jacob was once charged with treason. Even though this was during the Taylor years, following the Camp Johnson incident, he will never get rid of this stigma, and this, he says, will lock him out of any future formal security job. Yet even though it is hard for Jacob, like many other ex-combatants, to find employment in the formal security arena, the private and the informal arena is where Jacob can use his ex-

²⁶⁴ As described in chapter two.

combatant identity to his advantage. Through his cousin, and former commander, Jacob was recently employed by a Chinese road construction company. He is now the head of the company's small security team, a team he was trusted to handpick himself, and for this he used his ex-combatant network. He feels proud and happy that he has managed to secure jobs for other ex-combatants, and that his reputation as a former rebel commander here is something he can use to his advantage. In this arena his skills in security from the war are valued, and he can be treated with respect, despite his ex-combatant identity, or even because of it. But Jacob dreams of a different life – a life that can offer more for an ex-combatant than the informal security arena. He is trying to save money to study and get a university degree. Only then, he thinks, can he build a better life for him and his daughters.

Liberian ex-combatants: ready to return to war?

In a recent article on the contemporary situation of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, Kieran Mitton sets out to explain the now more than ten-year duration of the country's lasting peace, asking "Where is the war?" And it is indeed a very relevant question. As Mitton notes, ever since the war came to an end in 2002 there have been frequent warnings in UN, NGO and academic reports of the Sierra Leonean ex-combatants returning to war. It has been suggested that desperate political and socio-economic pre-war conditions persist, undermining ex-combatants' investment in peace. Yet, despite the warnings, Sierra Leone has experienced relative low levels of violence since the war came to an end. Supported by this fact, Mitton argues that the risks of ex-combatants returning to arms have been exaggerated. Nevertheless, Mitton notes, economic and political conditions continue to reconnect ex-combatants with peacetime violence.²⁶⁵ It is therefore unavoidable to question whether the warnings over the destructive potential of ex-combatants are misplaced or whether it is just a matter of time before Sierra Leone returns to war. As Mitton finds in the Sierra Leonean case, the frustration with the slow pace of development among former fighters and unemployed youths is real and may very well lead to some taking desperate measures, such as turning to violence to vent grievances or to make a better living. Yet the nature of the risk

²⁶⁵ Kieran Mitton, "Where is the War? Explaining Peace in Sierra Leone", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 20, No. 3, June, pp. 321-337, June, 2013, p. 321.

is often misrepresented. For one thing, linking youth's frustration to renewed conflict is often predicated upon misleading and simplistic readings of the causes of civil war, Mitton argues.²⁶⁶ One of the many important aspects that Mitton raises is that the assumptions of a return to civil war to a significant extent rest upon the implicit notion that ex-combatants are especially prone to violence, which in fact is certainly not the case for all former fighters. Even those among his informants who openly expressed a desire to return to fighting after demobilisation have now undergone a difficult process of adjustment, an adjustment that became essential to survive peace, and have accepted that the war truly is over. Many of the interviewed former fighters were, in fact, strongly opposed to renewed warfare.²⁶⁷

I would argue that much of this logic is true also in the Liberian case, where similar warnings have been raised frequently since the end of war. It is almost expected that the Liberian ex-combatants will return to war as soon as the opportunity arises and, furthermore, that being violent is a virtually inseparable part of the ex-combatant identity, which automatically will lead to a return to arms. Perhaps such assumptions are not so surprising after all, especially not in the case of former fighters within post-war rebel networks. These ex-combatants remained mobilised or at least preserved, rather than abandoned, their wartime links as well as chains of command from their time as rebels. And, as we have seen, these networks have also been used not only because of their skills in the field of security but also because of their potential for violence. Still, even though ex-combatants in general, and post-war rebel networks in particular, have the preconditions to be used in renewed warfare, it is much too simplistic to assume that the ex-combatants within such networks would readily resort to violence, even when there are few other opportunities, when frustration is high and political and socio-economic conditions are desperate. Yet, as McMullin has pointed out, the assumption that ex-combatant dissatisfaction alone can return a country to war via violent protests or criminal banditry still underpins DDR programmes, despite the fact that this claim disregards the deep scepticism that most Liberian ex-combatants have about the future efficacy of war.²⁶⁸ To understand why ex-combatants are not ready for violence and warfare

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 323.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 325.

²⁶⁸ McMullin, 2013, p. 395.

as easily as assumed I suggest that one needs to look not only at the structures and capabilities of post-war rebel networks but also at the individual stories of the ex-combatants within these networks and how they themselves use the different aspects of the ex-combatant identity, including being perceived as violent. Malcolm's story for instance, shows how vital his post-war rebel network is, especially when it comes to job opportunities. Malcolm is dependent upon his ex-combatant identity because it is through this identity, and this identity alone, that he finds assignments within the informal security sector. Having been a commander has perhaps also given him some benefits, he might not have been given as a foot soldier, as he from time to time is called upon to manage and organise ex-combatants for security assignments. But Malcolm wants out. He is tired of a life in the field of security where his violent potential is one of his most necessary qualities. But this is the field open to him: this is where he has the best chances for employment and so he continues, even past the age of forty and longing to leave the violence behind him.

Jacob also dreams of a life as something more than violent labour. He wants to study and leave the temporary security assignments he gets from time to time to give his daughters a better future. But like Malcolm and other ex-combatants he has an ambivalent feeling towards his ex-combatant identity, and his past as a commander. He has a reputation from the war: he was notorious and known to be fearless. This, he thinks, is what prevents him from finding other forms of employment than those within the informal security arena. At the same time, paradoxically, it is the combination of his ex-combatant identity, his post-war rebel network, and probably also his very reputation from the war that secures the assignments he makes a living from. It is striking that the one thing all my informants agree upon and what they often have told me over the years is that they do not want to see another war, and that they would never want to fight again, despite the fact that they all make their living by clinging to their post-war rebel network, taking on informal security assignments and are often used due to their violent potential or reputation as such, while struggling with poverty and limited opportunities.

What becomes clear by following the lives of individual ex-combatants is that they themselves feel that they have more to lose than to gain from a new war. That Michael, who we met in chapters two and three, would never want to see another war may not be unexpected. He has managed to establish himself in the Liberian society post-war with formal employment and a university education. But that a man like Abraham, who lives under strained circumstances in West Point, has the same point of view might be more difficult to understand if one takes a point of departure in the way ex-combatants are often portrayed. Ex-combatants who keep their wartime networks, are mobilised for informal security assignments, function as vigilantes, or simply do not hide their past are clearly expected to be easily recruited for yet another war, according to the stereotypical perception of them as having little to lose given their current situation. But Abraham, Jacob, Malcolm, Michael and many others do not see it in this way. Abraham, for instance, feels that he can give so much more to his family than he ever got. His life in West Point does not look like much to the world, and, at first glance, or with a stereotypical perception of former rebels in mind, Abraham may appear to be a man who would easily and willingly give up his current life for the opportunities that life as a rebel could offer. But a deeper look at him, and so many other ex-combatants, reveals that this is far from the truth. Post-war rebel networks have all the skills to be used in renewed warfare, but many ex-combatants would not readily return to arms. War never gave them a better life, and they are certain, even though everyday life is a struggle, that another war would not give them a better future either. They use their ex-combatant identity, networks, and skills learned from war not because they are waiting for a new opportunity to fight but simply because this identity is their most important asset in trying to survive peace. New generations will come that, due to desperate living conditions, for example, might see war as their best option. We have seen in the West African wars, and elsewhere that it is possible to build a militarised capacity quickly under the right circumstances. That the already-existing networks of ex-combatants in Liberia and the region, who already have seen what the war brought – and did not bring – with it, should be the biggest threats towards lasting peace is not as likely from this perspective.

Conclusion

- *Living with an ex-combatant identity, for good and bad*

Malcolm kept his personal photos in a small paper box tucked away in his room for safekeeping. As they are for most people, his photos were precious to him. He did not have many. He, like most Liberians, did not own a camera, and only had photos taken on special occasions. Wanting to show me a glimpse of his life, as showing photos implies for most of us, Malcolm took his paper box out into the courtyard one day when we were talking. There were photos of his loved ones. His family members and close friends. He showed me pictures of him and his father, other relatives and a few of himself at different ages. I was happy to see Malcolm's photos. He showed me yet another piece of himself by letting me see the people that mattered to him. There was nothing out of the ordinary about them, as there rarely is with family photos, but they still represented an important part of who Malcolm was. One of the photos stood out to me. "Where is this from," I asked; "Who are they?" I had found a photo of two men dressed up in suits, waving to a crowd of people from an open SUV. Serious-looking men hung on the sides of the car all dressed in black sunglasses with rolled up sleeves to expose their toned arm muscles. "What", Malcolm laughed, "don't you recognise me, don't you recognise us?!" After a closer look I obviously did. The men around the car were my informants during the 2011 election campaign, protecting Winston Tubman and George Weah, who greeted the crowd from the car. Then it struck me: apart from a picture of the men carrying guns in actual 'rebel' combat on the streets of Monrovia, the photo came as close as it could to the stereotypical image of who Malcolm and the rest of my informants were believed to be, and what they were expected to do. And yes, the "ex-combatant identity" was one of Malcolm's and my other informants' identities. And yes, it was a crucial one for them in post-war Liberia. Yet, as we have seen in this chapter, it was not the only one. It was but one of many. The ex-combatant identity in itself is also far more complex than the stereotypical image would have us believe.

We should remember that the ex-combatants we have met in this chapter, and in this thesis, are among those most intimately connected to their combatant past. They are those who could be considered to be the most hardened former fighters due to their continued activities

and preserved networks. Many of the ex-combatants followed in this thesis have a background as rebel commanders. Yet, even these men are far from the war-hungry, ready-to-fight-again militarised men the stereotypical images of them would suggest. To fully understand who the ex-combatants are, what they are capable of, and the security risks they constitute in Liberia and elsewhere today, we need to look at the ex-combatant identity from a more nuanced perspective than is most often shown in media, reports, and political statements. To do so we need to look at individual stories. When looking at ex-combatants as a group, we cannot easily escape the stereotypical perceptions attached to the ex-combatant identity. Due to media reporting and one-dimensional portrayals of wars and insecurity in Africa in general we know them merely as violent, angry, evil and irrational young men ready to go to war as soon as the opportunity is given. But when we look at individual stories, like those of Abraham, Malcolm, Jacob and others, we are forced to see a bigger picture. As Malcolm's box of photos revealed, he – like all other ex-combatants – are so much more than a mere product of war. Seeing them only as such, we have no way of truly understanding ex-combatants' part in post-war life in Liberia or what their continued informal security activities imply, and will continue to imply, in the future.

7. Conclusion

This dissertation places itself within a growing body of literature on post-war Liberia, but more specifically on ex-combatants post-war, in Liberia and beyond. The DDR literature, both academic and policy-oriented, has been particularly occupied with the complexity of the challenges that ex-combatants, and the society they are returning to after war, are faced with. But as the failures to successfully break down former rebel networks and reintegrate ex-combatants into civil society have been many, the focus in recent years has been on how to improve the practice of DDR for better and more long-lasting results. Special attention has especially been devoted to the complexity of one of the three components in particular: reintegration. While disarmament and demobilisation have been considered to be more short-term processes involving mainly technical challenges, reintegration has been identified by contrast as the maybe most vital, and difficult, component when it comes to turning combatants into civilians. The research for this thesis has taken a different approach. As a first theme in this concluding chapter, I will therefore discuss what I call **the reintegration paradox**. I will argue that demobilisation of former rebel groups is much more than a technical procedure and is much more complicated than is often assumed. As this thesis has shown, rebel networks in practice can easily remain mobilised long after their initial rebel group has been dissolved, while individual members of these post-war rebel networks may in fact be much more reintegrated into civil society than is often understood. Secondly, I will discuss the **demobilisation dilemma** that arises from this paradox. Findings from the thesis will be summarised in relation to a wider discussion on why failures or successes to demobilise ex-combatants have had less to do with the practice of DDR than is generally recognised. I argue instead that the fundamental question should be whether there in fact exists a will, or even a need, for former rebel networks to stay active and mobilised, even though there are no wars to be fought in post-conflict societies.

In this dissertation I have aimed to shed light on the relevance of post-war rebel networks in Liberia. But, as we shall discover in the next theme of this chapter, which I call **post-war rebel networks in Liberia and beyond**, this is not only a Liberian phenomenon. In this section I

examine my findings from Liberia through a wider discussion on ex-combatant networks in Liberia and other African countries. Here I call attention to the fact that post-war rebel networks have not been acknowledged to the extent that they should be. I suggest that this is due to the fact that such networks are seldom examined unless they are involved in renewed warfare. With the case studies of this dissertation reaching beyond ex-combatants as recycled regional warriors, I suggest how the findings in this thesis can contribute to a more nuanced and complex understanding of post-war rebel networks in Liberia and beyond. However, even though the phenomenon of existing post-war rebel networks has not been acknowledged to the extent I believe that it deserves, recent years have provided us with interesting findings on the topic on the African continent. In this section I wish to present such research and examine how my findings relate to this on-going debate. We will discover similarities as well as differences, and it will lead me into a summarising discussion of what risks networks of ex-combatants actually constitute post-war. Are they simply the real, and most acute, threat to peace they are often described as, or is the danger with lingering rebel structures a more complex issue?

In the final theme of this concluding chapter, called **from perpetrators to security providers?** we will engage in a deeper discussion of the ability to transform that ex-combatants and networks of ex-combatants have proved to possess. I will summarise the discussion of why the move from warrior to security provider is one that the ex-combatants may find natural to make in a post-conflict country like Liberia where instability and insecurity are still everyday realities for many citizens. Here we will once again come back to the importance of the 'ex-combatant identity'. In a concluding discussion we will further examine what this identity means for former rebels in post-war rebel networks. We will return to the discussion of whether one can escape such an identity and in that case if it is even desirable. That will lead us on to the question of how it can be possible that a life with an ex-combatant identity can be compatible with that of being a post-war informal security provider. It is my hope that such a discussion will contribute to the understanding of who the ex-combatants are today and what relevance post-war rebel networks have and what roles they play in contemporary Liberia, but also how that in turn affects the security political climate of the country.

The reintegration paradox

DDR is a central component of nearly all large-scale peace operations today, whether run by UN or other regional organisations.²⁶⁹ According to the United Nations Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Resource Centre, DDR aims to deal with the post-conflict security problem that arises when ex-combatants are left without livelihoods or support networks, other than their former comrades, during the vital transition period from conflict to peace and development. This is done through a process of removing weapons from the hands of combatants, taking the combatants out of military structures and helping them to integrate socially and economically into society.²⁷⁰ Especially when it comes to Africa, comprehensive and effective DDR processes are often seen as a fundamental precondition for peace, stability and human development in emerging post-conflict societies. The challenges of DDR in Africa have been noted. However, the first two components of DDR, disarmament and demobilisation, are most of the time not seen as the main difficulties. These components have been seen to pose primarily technical challenges. Above all, combatants must be registered, arms must be collected, and cantonment sites for the demobilised must be built. It is believed that with proper planning the disarmament and demobilisation steps can be effectively managed and implemented. Reintegration, on the other hand, is acknowledged as a far more complex and lengthy process in which backsliding is most common.²⁷¹ While I agree that reintegration is a complex issue I strongly believe that the complexity of demobilisation needs to be addressed to a much greater extent than it is today. It is of course, to a certain extent, a matter of definition and how we understand the concept of demobilisation as such. According to the UN, demobilisation is the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces and groups. It is also seen as a multifaceted process which marks the change of status of a combatant from military to civilian.²⁷² But demobilisation is also understood as the separation of combatants from their command and control

²⁶⁹ Mats Berdal and David Ucko, 2010, p. 2.

²⁷⁰ United Nations Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Resource Centre, "What is DDR?", available at: http://www.unddr.org/what-is-ddr/introduction_1.aspx

²⁷¹ Prosper Nzekani Zena, "The Lessons and Limits of DDR in Africa", *Africa Security Brief*, No. 24, January 2013.

²⁷² United Nations, General Assembly, "Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration – Report of the Secretary General", A/60/705, March 2, 2006.

structures.²⁷³ Or even as the actual elimination of military structures and units.²⁷⁴ It is my belief that too narrow a definition of demobilisation can never be fruitful. Demobilisation must imply more than when a rebel group, for instance, officially ceases to exist and when its members officially register for demobilisation. If we instead understand demobilisation to also include the abandonment of command and control structures, we will find, as this thesis has shown in its empirical chapters, that rebel structures easily continue to exist even after DDR processes. They remain mobilised even though they may not be armed or militarised. They may not be a rebel group, and they may not be mobilised for warfare, but their command structures remain beyond peace agreements. In that light, a broader perspective on demobilisation offers a better chance of understanding what happens, or does not happen, to rebel structures post-war.

Furthermore, when it comes to demobilisation it is of vital importance that we also discuss why we believe that post-war rebel networks should be broken at all costs. As the findings of this thesis suggest, there are good reasons for several actors to preserve, rather than to break these structures. de Vries and Weigink have come to similar conclusions when it comes to common assumptions in the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants. As they have argued, the focus on breaking up ex-combatants' command and control structures under all circumstances takes insufficient account of several important factors. One factor they point out is that the collective experience of combat can create a bond between people which may transcend their former connections to families and communities. Other factors include security issues and economic reasons for sticking together with fellow ex-combatants, in the hope of protection in fragile societies where renewed violence is a constant risk, and to conduct a common struggle for livelihoods where opportunities are scarce. de Vries and Weigink point out that patronage dynamics may lie behind ex-combatants' reasons for staying together. Economic, social and political benefits are provided for within networks of reciprocal relations. These relations may work horizontally between fellow ex-combatants or vertically

²⁷³ See for example Taies Nezam, and Alexandre Marc, "Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration", No. 119, *Social Development Department, conflict, crime and violence*, February, 2009, available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1164107274725/DDRFinal3-print.pdf>

²⁷⁴ Retro Rufer, "Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR): Conceptual approaches, specific settings, practical experiences", Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2005, p. 10.

between ex-combatants and their commanders, in order to distribute benefits within the network such as jobs, loans or other basic necessities.²⁷⁵ These findings fit well with those of this thesis, for my informants the post-war rebel networks have become vital. They have provided economic and social safety nets, as we have seen in the chapters. Therefore, I strongly agree with the authors as they suggest that an unreasonably strong emphasis has been put on the focus of dissolving ex-combatant networks in order to reintegrate ex-combatants. These structures may not be a more acute threat to renewed violence than individual ex-combatants, and that these structures provide opportunities for ex-combatants' that post-war societies may be too weak to offer.

I would argue that continued mobilisation in the form of post-war rebel networks has to a large extent been kept in the shadows and seldom been acknowledged, precisely because demobilisation has been seen mainly as a mere technical component before the real challenge of reintegration can begin. Contrary to the general view within the DDR literature that often identifies problems with ex-combatants post-war as being related to them being disarmed and demobilised but not reintegrated, I argue that these ex-combatants in many cases should be seen instead as more or less reintegrated but not demobilised. Looking more closely at the individuals we have followed in this thesis we see that they, in many ways, are ordinary members of their communities. They are indeed faced with an everyday struggle for livelihood, and they battle poverty and unemployment, but so do their fellow community members with a civilian background. In this sense they could be seen as reintegrated – or re-marginalised to borrow a term from Mats Utas²⁷⁶ – because they face the same difficulties and marginalisation as ordinary Liberians without a combatant past. But they do have an advantage most civilians lack: their post-war rebel network, which from time to time can provide them with temporary informal security jobs and occasional income.

²⁷⁵ Hugo de Vries and Nikkie Wiegink, "Breaking up and Going Home? Contesting Two Assumptions in the Demobilization and Reintegration of Former Combatants", in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 18, No.1, 2011, pp. 41-43.

²⁷⁶ Mats Utas has argued that re-marginalisation rather than reintegration appeared to be the norm for a large portion of ex-combatants post-war. Since many of the Liberian rebels initially came from the already marginalised and dissatisfied urban youth, re-marginalisation and not reintegration was the natural outcome. See Utas in Ed. Richards, 2005, p. 150.

Accordingly, I ultimately argue that the increased focus on the complexity of reintegration of ex-combatants in recent years is not a problem as such, but has rather drawn attention away from the equally complex issue of demobilisation. And without understanding why continued mobilisation of rebel networks is a natural outcome, no fruitful discussion on reintegration can come about either.

This thesis has demonstrated that a central aspect of the complexity of demobilisation relates to the fact that post-war rebel networks may serve as a source of reintegration into civilian livelihoods post-conflict. Herein lies a reintegration paradox, namely that the preservation of wartime command structures – contrary to the received logic of DDR initiatives in general – provides some ex-combatants with a better chance at post-war reintegration. Based on this paradox, we might need to start looking at both the ex-combatant identity and reintegration in a new light. Instead of treating the ex-combatant identity as a mere factor for stigmatisation or the ability to conduct violence, which therefore needs to be washed away to recreate productive and peaceful civilian citizens in a reintegration process, we may need to come to terms with the fact that this very identity might be the ex-combatants' best chance for reintegration. This identity along with their post-war rebel networks may, as we have seen in this dissertation, be the best option for many ex-combatants for finding a place and a role in post-conflict societies. Post-conflict rehabilitation initiatives, including DDR, therefore need to seriously and carefully consider whether it is in the best interest of ex-combatants and the post-conflict societies at large that post-war rebel networks are broken in the way that reintegration initiatives traditionally have aimed at doing. Consequently, this paradox complicates distinctions between military and civilian structures and unsettles the predominant focus on demobilisation as a technical procedure. But it also challenges basic underlying aims and purposes with the processes of demobilisation and reintegration. To put it sharply, one might even argue that these ex-combatants have succeeded in reintegrating themselves due to, not despite, the fact that they have not been demobilised.

The demobilisation dilemma

This leads me onto what I identify as the second problem with the concept of DDR connected to demobilisation, which relates to the will and need for rebel structures to linger. In this dissertation I have given several examples of what the ex-combatants themselves, as well as actors in power and ordinary citizens, may have to gain with the existence of post-war rebel networks. While it can be an important, and sometimes the only, way for ex-combatants themselves of securing employment, post-war rebel networks can be a means for elite actors to secure power, make financial gains or show force. At the same time, for ordinary citizens, post-war rebel networks can function as an alternative, or sometimes more reliable, security institution for everyday protection in the form of vigilantes or other types of informal security-providing networks. I argue that in societies where such a need or will to preserve rebel networks exists, DDR initiatives, no matter how well they are carried out, have very little to do with the actual relevance and existence of post-war rebel networks beyond the formal end of hostilities. It is my strong belief that such issues, like the potential need and will for the continued presence of rebel structures post-war, should be carefully examined before substantial resources are invested in DDR processes. We need to acknowledge and address the demobilisation dilemma and the reintegration paradox, and thereby challenge common assumptions of post-war rebel networks as mere security threats, to have a better chance of understanding post-war realities but also in order to make better investments in peace and security in countries emerging from war.

Based on these findings I would argue that future research, examining what it actually means to be reintegrated as an ex-combatant, is of vital importance. Here ex-combatants' own perceptions of what it means to be reintegrated requires to be examined, and how they themselves perceive both advantages and disadvantages associated with the ex-combatant identity. Predominant assumptions, suggesting that this identity needs to be abandoned in order for an ex-combatant to find a place in a post-war society where he or she not is in risk of automatically being use for renewed warfare, violence or be an object for stigmatisation, need to be challenged. We also need to seriously consider in what way and under what circumstances the preservation of post-war rebel networks in fact can facilitate reintegration

as well as contribute to the strengthening of security, not merely how and when such networks can be used to create instability.

Post-war rebel networks in Liberia and beyond

Post-war rebel networks have not been acknowledged to the extent they should be. One reason for this, I suggest, is that post-war rebel networks only become visible if followed over a lengthy period of time. By only examining the situation of ex-combatants, and their actions, on isolated occasions in time post-war, we miss the dynamics and mechanisms tying individual ex-combatants together in times of peace, long after war has come to an end. I have tried to do the opposite in this thesis. I have followed many of my informants over a relatively long period. I have returned to the same field and individuals over a number of years, and I believe that it is only through this longitudinal perspective that I have been able to see how, and why, these networks have remained relevant and how they have been adapted to function in a context of continued insecurity and instability in times of peace. The need to examine post-war rebel networks even in the absence of war leads me further onto another reason why such networks have often remained in the shadows. I would argue that this is because ex-combatants' continued state of mobilisation is not necessarily a visible phenomenon *unless* they engage in renewed warfare.²⁷⁷ We have seen several examples in recent years of attention paid to such developments, when ex-combatants, after the declaration of the end of one conflict, later reappear in another, not least in the West African region. For instance, in 2005 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that "a migrant population of young fighters" were gliding back and forth across the West African borders to join new conflicts after having participated in DDR processes in Sierra Leone or Liberia. Based on interviews with former combatants from fifteen armed forces HRW noted that the ex-combatants argued that given the dire economic conditions in the region, going to war was their best option for economic

²⁷⁷ An important exception is William Reno's research on the transformation of West African militia networks into commercial organisations and community-based NGO's for example. Here Reno shows how networks of former fighters can find economic niches in which to turn wartime bonds to commercial advantages. See William Reno, "Transforming West African Militia Networks for Postwar Recovery", in ed. Kristian Berg Harpenvik, *Troubled Regions and Failing States: The Clustering and Contagion of Armed Conflict*, Comparative Social Research, Vol. 27, 127-149, 2010. However, the transformation of wartime networks, as presented in the research for thesis, has mainly been limited to security-related activities. The situation at the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, presented in chapter three, nonetheless differs in this aspect, as the post-war rebel networks activities there initially could be seen as a commercial organisation in the sense Reno describes them.

survival. A military intelligence source with extensive experience in West Africa was interviewed and quoted by HRW about these post-war rebel networks as saying: “These guys form a part of a regional militia I call insurgent diaspora. They float in and out of wars and operate as they wish. They have no one to tell them when, where and how to behave. They’ve been incorporated into militias and armies all over the place – Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire – and are really the most dangerous tool any government or rebel army can have.”²⁷⁸ In chapter two of this dissertation I also show how networks of ex-combatants moved over West Africa borders as recycled warriors in times of conflict and political instability in the region. While I do agree that these post-war rebel networks strongly contributed to the continued violence and warfare in the region, I have tried to show, contrary to the statement above, how well organised recruitment and re-mobilisation often is. As shown in chapter two, ex-combatants of post-war rebel networks clearly had someone to tell them when, where and how to behave. This did not make them less of a threat to regional stability, but rather the opposite. In the same chapter, when it comes to the understanding of how and why networks of ex-combatants were recruited for renewed warfare, I have especially relied on research by Danny Hoffman.²⁷⁹ Hoffman’s research on Sierra Leonean and Liberian ex-combatants as violent labour which, in a well-structured and coordinated manner, could be assembled and redeployed in new violent settings is an important and detailed contribution describing this specific use of post-war rebel networks. Findings from Hoffman’s work, as presented earlier in this thesis, have not only contributed to explaining the logic behind why networks of ex-combatants have been used in renewed warfare, it has also given us important details of how this has been done. It has also presented further evidence against notions of the re-engagement of ex-combatants in new warfare as unorganised and chaotic, which corresponds well with my own findings.

Closely related to the discussion on ex-combatants engaged in renewed warfare is Anders Themnér’s comparative research on why some ex-combatants return to organised violence while others do not. Looking at ex-combatant communities in the Democratic Republic of

²⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Youth, Poverty and Blood – The Lethal Legacy of West Africa’s Regional Warriors”, Vol. 17, No. 5(A), March, 2005, p. 11.

²⁷⁹ See Hoffman, 2011.

Congo and in Sierra Leone, Themnér noted that a considerable number of former fighters resorted to organised violence after the declaration of peace. Themnér found that the most important determinants of ex-combatant violence are whether former fighters have access to entrepreneurs of violence and intermediaries, so called remobilisers, promising selective incentives such as cash and loot and using feelings of affinity, trust and fear to convince ex-combatants to resort to arms, and whether the former fighters have a strong social network binding them together. Re-marginalisation, on the other hand, offers the least insight into why only some ex-combatants return to organised violence, since this is the reality for most ex-combatants.²⁸⁰ My own research, in contrast to that of Themnér, does not focus mainly on ex-combatants in relation to renewed warfare, although this is an important aspect of chapter two. Here my findings from Liberia however correspond well with those of Themnér in the cases of the DRC and Sierra Leone when it comes to the importance of individuals through whom the ex-combatants may be mobilised around once more, or remain mobilised. In chapter two we could see how Michael, as an influential former rebel general, functioned as one among other key mobilisers when it came to recruiting for LURD in the region before the second wave of warfare in Liberia. That Michael was already part of a strong post-war rebel network, which had not vanished with the end of the first war in Liberia, was a vital aspect of his success as a remobiliser, which works well with Themnér's argument about the need for strong social networks as a precondition for remobilisation.

Another important and recent contribution to research on post-war rebel networks and their reengagement in renewed warfare has come from Maya Christensen. In her research Christensen follows former military and militia soldiers in Sierra Leone in the context of transition from war to peace. Christensen explores the process of mobilisation that these ex-militias and wartime networks are engaged in today, following the end of war, and how they gradually transform into new constellations of soldiering.²⁸¹ Using the concept of 'shadow soldiering' to highlight the blurred lines of division between the visible and the invisible and the entanglement of what is considered legal and illegal, private and public, state and non-

²⁸⁰ Themnér, 2011, pp. 161-162.

²⁸¹ Maya Mynster Christensen, *Shadow Soldering – Mobilisation, Militarisation and the Politics of Global Security in Sierra Leone*, Department of Cultural Anthropology, University of Copenhagen, PhD Thesis, PhD series no. 75, 2013.

state and civil and military, Christensen shows how ex-militias in Sierra Leone morph into security contractors in Iraq, or are mobilised into militarised networks in other parts of West Africa. Christensen examines processes of mobilisation of militarised networks in Sierra Leone that are less visible and take place in the shadows. She makes an important point when she argues that shadow soldiering is not a marginal phenomenon, taking place in situations of armed conflict and open warfare. It is also a peacetime phenomenon that is becoming increasingly central in the context of security outsourcing and militarisation in a global economy.²⁸² Acknowledging that networks of ex-militias can be engaged for both violent as well as non-violent purposes, Christensen focuses on violent forms of labouring in which male ex-militias engage, and particularly their mobilisation into militarised networks. By doing so Christensen illuminates how the post-war networks have transformed into political task forces and presidential guards, have become regional mercenaries and have been engaged in international security contracting for private and military companies in Iraq.

An important similarity to the Liberian post-war rebel networks I have followed in this thesis is that the networks of ex-militias that Christensen follows merge in a similar manner from one constellation of shadow soldiering to another over time in their struggle for survival, sometimes bringing them closer to their aspirations, while at other times, a step further away.²⁸³ As chapter four demonstrates, taking sides and letting oneself be mobilised for an informal security group during an election in Liberia will either have fortunate or disastrous consequences for my informants in a winner-takes-all context as post-war settings can be. While the examples Christensen presents of post-war mobilisation of ex-militias have mainly emerged in order to be used in zones of renewed warfare (with the exception of the case study of the mobilisation of ex-militias during the general elections in Sierra Leone), my own research provides only one example of post-war rebel networks used for this purpose. Instead, I have mainly focused on the mobilisation of informal security groups from post-war rebel networks in times of peace, or post-war. By doing so I hope to contribute to the understanding of the less visible continued mobilisation of wartime networks that is still security-related but

²⁸² Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸³ Ibid. p. 9.

not connected to renewed warfare, which remains an under-researched area that clearly would benefit from future in-depth research on these mechanisms.

I would argue that post-war rebel networks must be understood as a peacetime phenomenon to a higher extent than they are today. What my case studies show is that the need, and the will, to keep such networks mobilised does not automatically vanish with the end of war. In other words, the continued existence of post-war rebel networks is not primarily a token of forces seeking to sustain war or start renewed warfare. Post-war rebel networks are powerful tools for warfare that can be, and are, from time to time used for such purposes. But as this thesis has provided examples of, individuals within post-war rebel networks are not necessarily part of them because they are interested in taking up arms once again. This might be an important alternative for them but we should not assume that this is naturally their first-hand choice. Ex-combatants linger in these networks because they provide them with their most likely opportunity for livelihood, as such networks might open up doors for temporary employment such as informal security assignments. It would not make sense for an ex-combatant in a severely marginalised post-war setting to abandon his perhaps most important network when there are so few other opportunities. For this reason, post-war rebel networks cannot be understood simply as a threat to peace. They can be dangerous tools for actors seeking to conduct warfare and violent operations, but they can also be the very structures that keep ex-combatants away from conflict and provide some sort of stability following the end of war.

A similar conclusion has been drawn by Utas, Themnér and Lindberg in the Liberian case, as they argue that collaboration between governing elites and ex-commanders and their informal networks can in fact be central to the promotion of peace and stability. By using commanders as brokers for socio-economic services, elites can reach ex-combatants they would otherwise have difficulty accessing to distribute support such as money, food, scholarships and employment, but also information and political influence. In return, elites can secure loyalty that consequently will lead to stability, which is key in a successful post-war environment, they argue. Such collaboration can help the reintegration of ex-combatants into

society, while, at the same time, it is an efficient way for post-war elites to create stability and control in the absence of strong state institutions. Where DDR processes have failed, this mutual dependence could be perceived as an alternative, domestic solution to post-war insecurity, they note.²⁸⁴ Post-war rebel networks are, nevertheless, being used because of their potential to use violence. Yet, they are not necessarily used for violent *purposes*, which is an important distinction to make that is often forgotten when post-war rebel networks or ex-combatants are discussed exclusively in relation to renewed warfare or the risk of such. It is my hope that the research herein has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of ex-combatants and post-war rebel networks and of how this phenomenon relates to the risk of post-war instability, violence or renewed warfare.

From perpetrators to protectors?

In this thesis I have set out to answer the question of how and why networks of ex-combatants remain relevant in contemporary Liberia, many years after war has come to an end. I have tried to do so by shedding light on the current security situation, where I have shown how the formal state security organisations have failed to provide Liberian citizens with everyday protection. Ordinary citizens have had a history of searching for such protection elsewhere instead. In such an environment, the informal security arena has become of vital importance for individuals looking for actors providing security. However, this arena has become a natural platform for post-war rebel networks. From these networks informal security groups have emerged. For ordinary Liberian citizens, they have mainly been useful when they have emerged as vigilantes, providing protection in local communities in the absence of efficient police forces. But as we have seen in the case studies of this thesis, the existence of post-war rebel networks is not only, nor primarily, a result of the security needs of ordinary Liberian citizens looking for everyday protection. Actors at the highest level of the political and economic elite, contrary to official rhetoric, also have great interests in keeping post-war rebel networks mobilised. In chapter two we saw how the political elite not only in Liberia, but in the wider West African region, sought to use post-war rebel networks in renewed warfare

²⁸⁴ Mats Utas, Anders Themnér and Emy Lindberg, "Commanders for good and bad – Alternative Post-War Reconstruction and Ex-Commanders in Liberia", *Policy Note*, 6, 2014, The Nordic Africa Institute.

against political enemies. And, as discussed, this how we are most used to seeing ex-combatants who have preserved their wartime networks: as recycled regional warriors. But as the case studies of this dissertation have illuminated, post-war rebel networks are not just of interest to elite actors when needed for warfare. Post-war rebel networks have clearly been found useful as informal security providers. Networks of ex-combatants are able not only of creating chaos and causing violence; when given the task, post-war rebel networks can be efficient security providers. But the use of post-war rebel networks has at least two purposes seen from the elite actors' perspective. They are good at providing security but they can also clearly have an intimidating effect on others, which can sometimes be used to advantage. In chapter three we saw how the networks of ex-combatants remained active at the Guthrie Rubber Plantation after the government take-over. They did so not because the new management and the Liberian government failed to evict them but because the very same actors saw the lingering rebel structures at the plantation as a clear advantage. The ex-combatants were well organised, they had clear chains of command and by using their wartime skills they were efficient security providers. But furthermore, the ex-combatants' violent past, particularly that of key former commanders, made them highly intimidating, not only towards potential rubber thieves, but also towards other plantation workers. At a time when the new management often failed to pay their workers at the plantation, the management not only used the ex-combatants to protect their lands against intruders; notorious former rebel commanders could also be seen 'encouraging' workers to carry out their tasks despite not having been paid. The ex-combatants' violent potential thereby proved to be a very useful tool in the hands of the elite. With time, working conditions improved at the plantation, and the incentive to use the ex-combatants as intimidators against the plantation's own workers moderated. Simultaneously the post-war rebel network at the plantation began to make their journey from informal security providers to formal. They were promised official status, ID cards and uniforms. For the post-war rebel network this was the public recognition they had been waiting for. This was a proof that they had made the journey from rebels to security providers. This was the evidence that they had officially transformed from perpetrators to protectors.

Also in chapter four we have seen evidence of the elite using post-war rebel networks as late as in 2011, eight years after the war was declared over, and at this time for political purposes. Presidential candidate Winston Tubman's mobilisation of post-war rebel networks as informal security providers and personal bodyguards during the 2011 Liberian elections sheds light on several important reasons for the continued relevance of post-war rebel networks in contemporary Liberia. As Tubman's personal informal security force, the ex-combatants first of all functioned as efficient security providers, but it was perhaps just as important for Tubman to use such a network as a public display of force. With the ex-combatants on his side, now 'tamed' as security providers, Tubman could demonstrate his power to also control the roughest elements in Liberia, that is, those who had once created such violence and chaos in the country. Providing the ex-combatants with employment, if only just during the pre-election and election phase, could also have been a way to secure voters among the ex-combatant communities and their dependants. Similar tactics were used by the incumbent President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Her reaching out to commanders within post-war rebel networks was, as we could see in chapter four, a very strategic choice in order to mobilise votes and to ensure that she also remained in control of these potential tools of violence. Providing at least a few of them, particularly key individuals, with security positions after her election victory has been a way to continue to secure her indirect rule over such networks. Post-war rebel networks, from which new informal constellations of ex-combatants can easily rise, thereby continue to be relevant tools which elite actors, even at the highest level of power, can use for different, often hidden, purposes in post-war Liberia.

But what does the journey from rebel to security provider imply for the ex-combatants themselves? In this dissertation I have asked whether taking on temporary informal security jobs is what the ex-combatants desire and whether an identity as a security provider is even compatible with that of an ex-combatant. What I have found is that ex-combatants attach themselves to post-war rebel networks because through such structures, and sometimes only through these structures, they have a chance to survive post-war. By preserving the links to former commanders, and former fellow combatants, they have an opportunity to secure at least temporary employment. This has naturally been in the informal security sector, due to skills the ex-combatants achieved in times of war. What I have found is that ex-combatants

remain within post-war rebel networks, contrary to what often is argued, not for sentimental reasons, in other words not because the ex-combatant identity in itself is something they are proud of and wish to preserve for such purposes. Neither is it because the ex-combatants are primarily seeking yet another war to fight. Ex-combatants are part of these structures due to their potential to provide a livelihood. The post-war rebel networks can provide a social and economic safety net where few other opportunities are available. The post-war identity as an ex-combatant thereby becomes important for the individuals within such networks, and it entails advantages as well as disadvantages. Negative perceptions are clearly attached to the ex-combatant identity, perceptions that are not easily escaped. Ex-combatants are seen as violent and unpredictable. And for some the stigmatisation has been too much to bear. For them, hiding their combatant past has been the only way of coping. But for my informants, the ex-combatant identity, despite the difficulties ensuing from being categorised as an ex-combatant, has been the factor that has granted them access to work opportunities. Working with informal security may not be what most of them dream of, but with a background as a rebel it is within this field they seem to have the most realistic opportunities for making a living. The ex-combatant identity is important because in a marginalised post-war society you need to play with what you have. For these individuals a mere civilian identity, even though this would imply less risk of stigmatisation, would not be beneficial from a livelihood perspective. The ex-combatant identity is, therefore, for better or for worse, the very element that may provide individuals in post-war rebel networks with a role in civil society and enable a transformation in which they are seen to have evolved from perpetrators to protectors.

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Appendix 1

List of main informants²⁸⁵

Abraham

Currently based in: Monrovia, Liberia.

Combatant background: NPFL 1991 – 1994.

Ethnic background: Kpelle

Post-war informal security activities: Commander in CDC informal security group.

Interviewed: At several occasions during 2013.

Alex

Currently based in: Monrovia, Liberia.

Combatant background: Never took part in the war as a combatant.

Ethnic background: Krio/Bassa

Post-war informal security activities: Vigilante leader in Monrovia. Commander in CDC informal security group.

Interviewed: At several occasions during 2009 – 2013.

Alpha

Currently based in: Bomi County, Liberia.

Combatant background: NPFL 1990-1997.

Ethnic background: Gola

Post-war informal security activities: Informal security commander at Guthrie Rubber Plantation/Sime Darby.

Interviewed: At several occasions during 2009 – 2013.

Jacob

Currently based in: Monrovia, Liberia.

²⁸⁵ In order to protect the identities of my informants their real names have not be used in this thesis.

Combatant background: ULIMO 1991 – 1993, LPC 1993 – 1995, Taylor’s presidential guard 2002 – 2003.

Ethnic background: Krahn

Post-war informal security activities: Short-term positions within different private security companies.

Interviewed: At several occasions in 2013.

Malcolm

Currently based in: Monrovia, Liberia.

Combatant background: NPFL 1990 – 1997, SSU 1997 – 1999, ATU 1999 – 2003.

Ethnic background: Bassa

Post-war informal security activities: Commander in CDC informal security group. Short-term informal security assignments.

Interviewed: At several occasions during 2011 – 2013.

Michael

Currently based in: Monrovia, Liberia.

Combatant background: AFL 1992 – 1993, LPC 1993 – 1997, LURD 1999 – 2003.

Ethnic background: Krahn

Post-war informal/formal security activities: Commander at Guthrie Rubber Plantation during rebel occupation. Senior position in one of the country’s security institutions.

Interviewed: At several occasions during 2011 -2013.

Simon

Currently based in: Monrovia, Liberia.

Combatant background: AFL 1992 – 1993, ULIMO 1993 – 1997, LURD 1999 – 2003.

Ethnic background: Krahn

Post-war informal security activities: Informal security commander at Guthrie Rubber Plantation/Sime Darby.

Interviewed: At several occasions during 2009 – 2012.